Henry Irving.

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HENRY IRVING.

VITA · SINE · LITERIS · MORS · EST

HENRY IRVING

IN

ENGLAND AND AMERICA

1838–84

BY

FREDERIC DALY

'This above all: To thine own self be true;
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

SHAKESPEARE

"'Perseverance keeps honour bright.' Do your duty. Be faithful to the public to whom we all appeal, and that public will be faithful to you.'—HENRY IRVING

WITH VIGNETTE PORTRAIT ETCHED BY AD LALAUZE.

London
T. FISHER UNWIN
26 PATERNOSTER SQUARE
1884

"AS IN A MIRROR, WE SEE IN PLAYS WHAT IS BECOMING IN A SERVANT, WHAT IN A LORD, WHAT BECOMES THE YOUNG, AND WHAT THE OLD. CHRISTIANS SHOULD NOT ENTIRELY FLEE FROM COMEDIES, BECAUSE NOW AND THEN THERE ARE COARSE MATTERS IN THEM. FOR THE SAME REASON WE MIGHT CEASE TO READ THE BIBLE."—MARTIN LUTHER.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY ASSOCIATIONS.

PAGE

February 6, 1838—A Schoolmaster Alarmed—"It's a Bad Profession"—A Curious Coincidence 1

CHAPTER II.

PROBATION.

A Spiteful Fairy—The First Disappointment—Hamlet: An Augury—London at Last 10

CHAPTER III.

FIRST SUCCESSES IN LONDON.

A Monopoly of Stage Villains—Stirring Encouragement—A Momentous Experiment—At the Lyceum—"The Bells"—Pleasant Prophecies—"Charles I."—"Eugene Aram"—A too subtle Richelieu—"Philip"—Hamlet: a Fulfilment—Shakespeare spells Popularity . . . 18

CHAPTER IV.

SHAKESPEARE AND TENNYSON.

Tradition at Bay—"Queen Mary"—Academic Honours—Exit Cibber—"The Lyons Mail"—"Louis XI."—End of the Bateman Management 42

CHAPTER V.

ACTOR AND MANAGER.

PAGE

A Brilliant Coadjutor—"The Iron Chest"—"The Merchant of Venice"—"The Corsican Brothers"—Edwin Booth at the Lyceum—Should Iago eat Grapes?—Helen and Modus 56

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD TALISMAN AND THE NEW.

"Romeo and Juliet"—Benedick—Whipped Cream—The Light of Other Days 70

CHAPTER VII.

HONOURS AND FAREWELLS.

The Fourth of July, 1883—Lord Coleridge's Speech—Mr. Irving's Purity of Purpose—An Unfounded Criticism—Manager and Friend—A Birthday Present to America—Mr. Irving's Reply—Macready's Testament—A Memorable Farewell—The Decline of Bigotry—An Art which never Dies—Scenic Decoration—"This Dear Hamlet"—At Knowsley—Westward Ho! 78

CHAPTER VIII.

THE AMERICAN TOUR, 1883-84.

"The Peculiar Dimple"—A Wholesome Understanding—First Night in New York—"Unqualified Popular Approval"—"They wanted to like me"—An Easy Method of Criticism—A Comical Delusion—The Actors and Louis XI.—A Tribute to Shylock—"Hamlet" in Philadelphia—"Because they are true"—The Rift in the Lute—"The Lyons Mail" in Boston—"I found them extremely warm"—But Chicago—Que voulez-vous?—New and Old Methods

PAGE

—"The Prince and the Gentleman"—Chicago's Ecstasy—A Washington Oracle—New Definition of Originality—The Chief Lessons for Americans—Recantation—One for Indianapolis 108

CHAPTER IX.

AMERICAN CRITICISM.

"Barn-stormers," Begone!—The Truth about Mannerisms—Philadelphia Converts—Mr. Towse's Idea of Genius—An "Incongruous" Shylock—Mr. Irving's Opportunities—Genius under a Bushel—What is the Creative Faculty?—The Supreme Charm 157

CHAPTER X.

THE SECRET OF SUCCESS.

A Truism—A Critic's Dilemma—Mr. Archer's "Lump"—"Uncritical" Gratitude—Is this Inspiration?—Clashing Torches—The Actor's Art—The Real Methods of Success—A Rehearsal at the Lyceum—Ingenuity or Imagination—Passive Detractors—Rabid Hostility—Uninspired Censors—Mr. Irving's Guide—Palmy Days of the Drama—"Hamlet" in Shakespeare's day—The Educational Standpoint—An Enterprising Manager 176

CHAPTER XI.

ESSAYS AND ADDRESSES.

Puritanic Inconsistency—An Appeal to the Clergy—The Perry Barr Institute—The Actor's Highest Aim—Shakespeare and his Interpreters—Utility of the Average Drama—The Property of Educated People—A Timid Bishop—Is a Dramatic School Necessary?—The Demands of Public Taste—Our Indebtedness to the Stage—The Faults of the Stage—"The Actor—Shakespeare"—A Noble Privilege—A Nut for the "Unco' Guid"—

PAGE

Student and Playgoer—"Thinking Aloud"—The Recruits of the Stage—Has Punch Feelings?—The Tests of Personal Art—Did Ophelia Know?—A Compliment from Salvini 212

CHAPTER XII.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS.

A Tennysonian Idyll—The Despair of Photographers—A Recipe for Caricature—A Staircase Tragedy—An Odd Medley—The Old Lady at Stratford-on-Avon—A Story of Macready—Captivated Divines—At the Back of the North Wind—Unspoiled by Fortune—The Reward of Great Deeds 257

APPENDIX.

List of Parts played by Mr. Irving in London since October 6, 1866 279
Mr. Edwin Booth on the English Stage 281
Mr. Irving's Macbeth 287
A Scottish Clergyman's First Visit to a Theatre 293

HENRY IRVING.

CHAPTER I.

EARLY ASSOCIATIONS.

FOR the majority of readers the life of an eminent actor has an inexhaustible interest. He moves in an atmosphere of sentiment: he ranges over the whole gamut of human passion; from his lowest note to the top of his compass he commands the ear of an enthusiastic public. His career is as interesting as that of a hero in a novel; nay more, for the most brilliant hero of fiction is after all a visionary being, while the actor may be seen in his habit as he lives, and his admirers may find a unique joy in the mixture of realism and imagination presented by his embodiments. To many people the drama is so absorbing a passion that its most gifted exponents are exalted to pedestals a

little bewildering to the prosaic critic, and are invested with all the virtues which in the exercise of their calling they have occasion to represent. The playgoers who assemble at a pit door some hours before the play begins, and who regard their favourite actor's autograph as a priceless acquisition, may not be endowed with the most perfectly balanced judgment, but their instinct is none the less true because its ebullitions are untutored. Unless the actor has mastered the hearts of his public, it is needless for him to appeal to their heads. If he makes them laugh, it is well; if he makes some of them weep, it is better. And though the drama does not fill so large a space in the lives of all as it does in those of its most ardent devotees, the world has strong reason to be grateful to the artists whom the sovereign gift of imagination enables to illuminate the highest dramatic literature, and to preserve for us many of the precious illusions which keep the heart fresh and the memory green.

To this privileged band belongs the subject of the present biography. Few actors in any age have excited the extraordinary interest which has followed every phase of Mr. Irving's career since he became famous. It is odd to look back to the

time when some of the censors of the stage asked themselves who was this young man whose performances were surprising the London public. He had played well in modern drama for a number of years. One or two acute observers like the late Charles Dickens and Mrs. Sartoris (Adelaide Kemble) had discerned in him the promise of a great future. But nobody dreamed that here was the man who was to revolutionise the modern school of tragic acting, to restore the poetic drama, and to make Shakespeare once more a vital force on the English stage, instead of a dim deity to whom managers occasionally sacrificed a great deal of money. So when Henry Irving began to create no small stir in the theatrical world, there were many who shrugged their shoulders, and said that it was another case of the rising rocket and the falling stick. They did not know, and it was impossible that they should know, that to remarkable talent, energy, and concentrated purpose, the young actor added a store of experience which made his success no mere passing blaze, but the solid triumph of a well-equipped mind.

Somersetshire claims John Henry Brodribb Irving amongst its sons. He was born at Keinton, near Glastonbury, on February 6, 1838, a date which is

held in high honour in countless birthday books. Cornishmen are apt to declare that the tragedian belongs to their county; and he certainly comes of Cornish stock, for both his father's and his mother's kindred, the Penberthys and the Behennas, have been well known in the country round St. Ives for generations. In Cornwall, too, the boy passed his early years, and showed the first germ of his mimetic faculty; and though he did not learn much from books, he learned a good deal from Nature. His mother died when he was still young, but his father watched his upward career with the minute care of parental pride, compiled a huge volume of newspaper extracts about his performances, and lived to see him at the head of his profession in the memorable year when he played Hamlet for the first time in London.

At eleven years of age young Irving was placed at a school in George Yard, Lombard Street, under the care of Dr. Pinches. If the good Doctor could re-visit the glimpses of the moon, he would find—probably with mixed feelings—that he had been immortalised in what is now a very familiar anecdote. Irving astonished his schoolfellows by his dramatic capacity, and he still more astonished his master by proposing to recite Glassford Bell's

gloomy poem of "The Uncle" on the speech day. Dr. Pinches did not object to the good old-fashioned recitations which consisted of extracts from the speeches of famous men, like that once wonderful oration of William Pitt, when, in reply to Horace Walpole, he confessed to "the atrocious crime of being a young man." But a poem which described the remorse of a murderer was too strong for the Doctor's nerves; so the boy was disappointed. Mr. Irving has recited "The Uncle" many times since, and often, no doubt, with a pleasant recollection of the schoolmaster's solemn head-shaking over the ambition of his too theatrical pupil.

Like many boys who have become famous in art and literature, young Irving began life in a merchant's office. But his heart was in his dramatic studies. He joined an elocution class, and gave all his leisure to the literature of the stage. Self-reliance was a prominent feature of his character at a very early age, for he was earning his own living at thirteen, and by a Spartan subsistence saving money to buy books. Many of his fellows probably shared his ambition to be an actor. Few young men of taste and sensibility have not believed some time or other that destiny was impelling them to adopt the sock or buskin. But

Irving was the one member of this little community in whom the love of the drama engaged not only his dreams but his practical energies. He soon enjoyed an easy supremacy in the entertainments given by the elocution class. This was not only because of the superior strength of his dramatic instinct, but because in every play in which he was interested, he did his best to master the whole scheme and arrangement. Even thus early was visible the capacity which has made him the greatest stage-manager of his time. He was not only absorbed in the part which struck his imagination, but penetrated by the whole spirit of the play. Moreover, he took lessons from an actor named Hoskins, who was engaged at Sadler's Wells, and who introduced him to Mr. Phelps. Phelps was then a great power in the theatrical sphere. His management of Sadler's Wells was distinguished by a conscientious devotion to his art, and for eighteen years he maintained the dignity of the higher drama with an energy and capacity which entitled him to the lively gratitude of his contemporaries. To Mr. Hoskins's young friend he held out no prospect of brilliant advancement. Phelps was to some extent a prey to the influence which inspired Macready with a morbid

hatred of his profession, and which, in later days, has prompted Mrs. Fanny Kemble to take up a somewhat monotonous parable against the art which gave her a famous name. "Have nothing at all to do with it, young man," said the manager of Sadler's Wells; "it's a bad profession." The young man looked at the manager, and thought he seemed tolerably contented; looked at the manager's house, and was struck by its air of comfort; and then reflected that a profession which produced such surroundings could not be wholly thankless. But Phelps was not a man to ignore rising merit, and he offered young Irving an engagement which, though it did not carry with it the most dazzling emoluments, must have been very tempting to a novice. To enlist under the banner of Macready's lieutenant, in a theatre which was then the only temple of the poetic drama, might well have seemed a most hopeful augury to the imaginative youth. But that practical shrewdness which is conspicuous amongst Mr. Irving's varied gifts led him to decline Mr. Phelps's proposal. He was resolved to begin his career in the provinces, and not to face a London audience till he had the confidence of an extensive experience. The conditions of theatrical success have greatly changed

since then. Now, a young man of good appearance, and with an excellent wardrobe, expects to earn his fifteen guineas a week at a London theatre, without much preliminary trouble in the shape of probation. The old stock companies which made the provinces so excellent a school for young actors have disappeared. But in that time a man who was determined to rise laid a pretty solid foundation of success, though the task necessitated a period of comparative obscurity which would have appalled the *jeunes premiers* of to-day. From the first Mr. Irving applied himself to his art as a serious business, and not as if it were a plaything which was to bring him fortune without costing him any particular exertion. Before he spoke a line on the stage he had a far stronger grasp of the elements of success, a far higher knowledge of the real spirit of the drama, than many actors who had been labouring for years. They knew more than he did about the technicalities of the profession; but he had an imagination and a power of mastering detail, which soon carried him above their highest mark.

There are several stories, more or less mythical, about Irving's first appearance on the stage. He is said to have been so nervous when he faced his

first audience that he was strongly recommended to return to the merchant's office. His second venture is reported to have been even more disastrous, for his heart so completely failed him when he was playing Cleomenes in "A Winter's Tale," that he fled from the scene with an incoherent entreaty to his fellow-artists to "come on to the market-place." Whatever truth there may be in these legends, it is certain that Irving's career began with a curious coincidence. His first engagement was at the new Sunderland Theatre, which was opened on September 29, 1856. The name of the theatre was the Lyceum, the play was "Richelieu," and Irving took the small part of the Duke of Orleans. Seventeen years later the boy who had stammered the first words of Bulwer Lytton's drama to a Sunderland audience was the cynosure of a brilliant assemblage in a far more famous Lyceum, when he appeared for the first time in the robes of the great Cardinal himself.

CHAPTER II.

PROBATION.

IN 1857 Irving obtained an engagement at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh, where he remained for two years and a half, associated with such artists as Miss Cushman, Miss Helen Faucit, Vandenhoff, Robson, Charles Matthews, Benjamin Webster, and Wright. Some idea of the extent and variety of the young actor's work during this period may be formed from the fact that he played nearly three hundred and fifty parts. Many of these, no doubt, are quite forgotten, and never represented any remarkable types of character. Mr. Irving acted in a great many light pieces, and even disported himself as a spiteful fairy in a burlesque. Long before he was famous, Edmund Kean was wont to perform as a harlequin, and in after years he accomplished in some death

scene a remarkable fall, which he attributed to his experience as a tumbler. Whether Mr. Irving has ever found his performance of a spiteful fairy specially useful to him in after life, I cannot say; but it is plain that a young man could not play so many parts without gaining invaluable knowledge of his profession. Even a character like Henry Bertram, in which the actor has to sing, was not considered beyond his range. Unquestionably, his labours at this time made Irving a favourite with the Edinburgh public. There is a widely accepted story that he used to be hissed in very early days because he acted so ill. Hissed he certainly was, and he felt it so acutely that he administered a pointed rebuke to the Edinburgh playgoers on the last night of his engagement at the Theatre Royal, when they assembled to bid him a cordial farewell. But the ill-natured demonstration which hurt him so much was due not to his demerits, but to the dissatisfaction of some frequenters of the theatre because he was entrusted with parts in which they had been accustomed to see an old favourite. Yet the story that Irving used to be hissed because he acted so badly is an ever-delightful morsel to people who are annoyed and puzzled by his

phenomenal success; and, if small malice could overthrow a mountain, would cheerfully pull him down. When Irving left Edinburgh he was only one and twenty, and had not been three years on the stage, yet his popularity was such as to justify his playing Claude Melnotte for his benefit, a performance which was received with acclamations. Scottish playgoers, as he said in a speech at Glasgow, shortly before his departure for America, were the first to take him by the hand; and their generous recognition was a fitting crown for his success in later years.

At Edinburgh Irving made the acquaintance of John Toole, an acquaintance which ripened into a close friendship. In art the two men are as the poles asunder, but in private life there is that bond between them which often knits together natures apparently diverse. Always anxious to advance the interests of his friend, in whom he had a profound belief from the beginning, Toole thought he had made a fine stroke by obtaining for Irving a three years' engagement at the Princess's Theatre, under the management of the late Augustus Harris. Here, it seemed, was the promised land at last. The young actor felt that he was strong enough to win a London reputation;

and, full of hope, he made his way to the metropolis, with the cheers of his Edinburgh friends ringing in his ears, and nerving his heart. But a bitter disappointment awaited him. His first appearance at the Princess's (September 24, 1859) was in a small part in "Ivy Hall," an adaptation of Octave Feuillet's "Le Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre." To a young man, who a few weeks previously had played Claude Melnotte to the admiration of all who saw him, the task of speaking a few lines in the opening of a new drama was anything but a romance. Was this, then, the great opportunity of which he had dreamed so long? Was he to fret his heart out in trivial parts for three years, and lose all the advantage he had gained? He found that there was no prospect of advancement, as the elder actors had a monopoly of all the important characters. But fortunately he was not the slave of his bond. The manager released him from his engagement, and he returned to the country, determined never to set foot on the London stage again till he could do so as an actor of acknowledged merit. But before leaving London he gave ample evidence of his powers in readings of "Virginus" and "The Lady of Lyons," which made a vivid

impression on the literary and dramatic critics, amongst whom were E. L. Blanchard, Edmund Yates, and many members of the old Arundel Club.

For a short time Irving played at Glasgow in a company formed by the late Edmund Glover, and numbering actors like Edwin Booth, Gustavus Brooke, Sothern, Charles Matthews, and Dion Boucicault. This engagement began in April, 1860, and in the same year Irving transferred his energies to Manchester, where he remained till 1865. So great was his popularity with the Manchester playgoers that they suspended the rule of a nightly change of characters—a remarkable innovation in those times. The patrons of the drama, even in large cities, liked to have a new play-bill every evening; and it was no small tribute to Irving's talent, that it made people anxious to see him in the same part several nights in succession. It was at Manchester that, in conjunction with Frederic Maccabe and Philip Day, he effected his famous exposure of the Davenport Brothers, the inventors of the cabinet trick and other marvels, which are now part of the stock-in-trade of every conjuror. The Davenports would have done well enough if they had

not claimed supernatural influence. Irving detected the imposition, and, aided by his friends, gave a public entertainment, in which he confounded the miracle-mongers by reproducing all their wonders, and opening the eyes of their dupes. But this is not the episode by which Irving's career at Manchester deserves chiefly to be remembered. On the eve of his departure he determined to play Hamlet, and the rest of the company, with whom he was very popular, thinking that this was a slight aberration, consented to fool him to the top of his bent. The idea of a young man, who was very well as Laertes, proposing to scale the heights of tragedy in this fashion, caused much diversion. But when Irving played Hamlet there was no more joking. Both audience and actors were full of wonder and enthusiasm. The performance was afterwards repeated for three nights, and some who witnessed it built great hopes on the young actor, who had revealed so much capacity. But it is very noteworthy that these expectations were not shared by the actor himself. The outlook did not encourage him to indulge in ambitious dreams, for he could conceive no possible chain of circumstances by which he might win a reputation in the higher

drama. Managers were not fond of speculations in Shakespeare, and to suppose that he would ever find a manager willing to take him out of the groove in which he had been trained, and to support him in the most dangerous venture known to the profession, seemed a chimera which, if foolishly cherished, could excite only fever and vexation of spirit.

This was in 1865, and after a six months' engagement at Liverpool, at the end of which there was a temporary blank, Irving found himself on the highway to an acknowledged position on the London boards. In the theatrical profession there is a superstitious faith in luck. If a man goes down, it is because the hand of destiny presses unkindly on him; if he is prosperous, it is because fortune has had an amiable caprice. "The lucky actor," said Mr. Irving, to an assembly of his comrades in London, not long ago; "the lucky actor works!" and then he told them how, in those Liverpool days, when he found himself without an engagement, there came an offer from Dion Boucicault of a leading part in that dramatist's new play entitled "The Two Lives of Mary Leigh," afterwards known as "Hunted Down." This marked the beginning of a new and im-

portant phase in the actor's career, for he joined Mr. Boucicault's company at Manchester (July 30, 1866) on the condition that if he achieved a success he should have an important engagement at a London theatre. It was in the character of Rawdon Scudamore that Mr. Irving first impressed Mr. Boucicault—no mean judge—with his remarkable power of realising a conception in soliloquy. He seemed to get at the very heart of the personality he was assuming. His soliloquy was that "thinking aloud" which is the most difficult accomplishment of histrionic art, and which Mr. Irving has made so notable in his greatest impersonations. Rawdon Scudamore was a distinct success, and Mr. Irving was accordingly engaged to play leading parts at the St. James's Theatre. He had waited seven years for his second opportunity in London, and he had several times declined the terms offered by Mr. Fechter, who was then at the Lyceum; but the interval had been profitably spent in developing his method and amplifying his resources.

CHAPTER III.

FIRST SUCCESSES IN LONDON.

ON October 6, 1866, Mr. Irving appeared at the St. James's Theatre in the character of Doricourt, in "The Belle's Stratagem;" one of the few comedies of the eighteenth century which have survived to the present day. In this impersonation, some of the most agreeable qualities of the actor's style, the artistic refinement, the distinction, and the delicate humour, were conspicuous, and the performance was received with great favour. After a lapse of seventeen years Doricourt still holds a place in Mr. Irving's repertory, for it is a pleasant specimen of his lighter comedy, and serves to confound the sceptics who affirm that he is never graceful.

In November of this year, Mr. Irving renewed his impersonation of Rawdon Scudamore, and

for some time he was identified with the portraiture of villainy in all its forms. It is not a little curious to note the contemporary criticism of the consummate iniquity which it was often his task to depict. The phrase by which he was generally introduced was, "Mr. Irving, who seems to have a monopoly of stage villains;" and the critic rarely concluded his comments without an expression of wonder at the actor's power in embodying the essence of wickedness. One writer was moved to recall Dr. Johnson's dictum that, "if Garrick really imagined himself to be the abominable rascal whose character he represented on the stage, he ought to be hanged every time he acted." It was the universal opinion that in Mr. Irving had been discovered an artist of no common order, whose criminals were not of the conventional, exaggerated, stagey type, but instinct with a realism which stamped them as transcripts from life. The grasp of character, the elaboration of detail, and the freedom from extravagance were recognised by all judges, foremost amongst whom was Charles Dickens, who repeatedly expressed his admiration of Mr. Irving's "singular power." A few of these stage villains may be enumerated to show Mr.

Irving's versatility in this branch of his art. Joseph Surface and Count Falcon, the latter a prominent character in an adaptation from Ouida's novel of "Idalia," belonged to the intellectual class of the unscrupulous; but after them we find, in a descending scale, such personages as Bob Gassitt in Mr. H. J. Byron's "Dearer than Life;" Compton Kerr, in Mr. Boucicault's "Formosa;" Redburn, in Mr. Byron's "Lancashire Lass;" Robert Macaire; and in the lowest deep of all, Bill Sikes. The actor who has spanned the gulf which divides Bill Sikes from Hamlet has surely a strong claim to be considered a profound student of human nature.

But Mr. Irving's talents were not limited during this period to illustrations of crime. As Harry Dornton in "The Road to Ruin," Petruchio, Charles Surface, Young Marlow, Captain Absolute, De Neuville in "Plot and Passion," and, above all, as Mr. Chevenix, in Byron's comedy of "Uncle Dick's Darling," he proved himself a comedian of the highest class. The extraordinary amount of work which he had accomplished during his provincial training seemed to have left little beyond his range, and his transitions from melodrama verging on tragedy to high comedy,

and even to farce of the Jeremy Diddler order, bewildered those who expected an actor always to correspond to the label they had attached to him. The efforts which were made to determine the character of Mr. Irving's genius were chiefly labour thrown away, for the critics had no sooner decided that his bent was distinctly in one direction than he flashed off in another. Accordingly, we find that the actor who has played Mathias and Charles I. was once ticketed as "a light-character-eccentric-comedian," and that other equally marvellous and misleading names were found for him. But though it was apparent to some that in everything he undertook at this time he showed nothing so clearly as his superiority to the position he then held, it may be doubted whether any were prepared for the revelation which was close at hand. There was one noteworthy exception. Amongst the admirers of Mr. Irving's acting was a lady whose encouragement was well calculated to spur his ambition. Mrs. Sartoris (Adelaide Kemble) wrote that he reminded her vividly of the most famous members of her family, and constantly urged him to devote himself to the higher drama.

It should be remembered here that when Mr.

Irving played Petruchio (December 26, 1867), the Katherine of the occasion was Miss Ellen Terry. This was the first meeting of these two great artists; and they never played together again till, eleven years later, Miss Terry became the chief support of Mr. Irving's management of the Lyceum, a co-operation which has been productive of the happiest results for the modern stage.

On June 20, 1875, Mr. Irving appeared as Digby Grant in Mr. Albery's "Two Roses," at the Vaudeville Theatre, and touched his highest point in modern comedy. This portrait, by far the most original in a play not remarkable for strength of motive, was perfected by many delicate touches of art, and delighted playgoers for two hundred nights in London, and one hundred in the provinces. But the interest with which this impersonation of Digby Grant will be remembered is due to the fact that it marked the turning point of the actor's career. Mr. Irving now stood, if not foremost, at all events in the first rank of comedians, but he was restless and dissatisfied. He had not yet, be it observed, formed any definite aim. In the first stirrings of untried genius there is no element of calculation. But he had a vague idea that he could strike a vein far higher than "Two Roses,"

and all that he had hitherto achieved, if the golden opportunity should present itself. The impulse towards tragedy which had led him to play Hamlet five years before returned, but with it came all the doubt of ever finding a manager who would help him, and all the natural misgivings as to his own powers and the public support. It was at this critical moment that he met Mr. H. L. Bateman, the manager of the Lyceum Theatre, and became acquainted with "The Bells," a dramatic version, by Mr. Leopold Lewis, of the well-known story of Erckman-Chatrian. In this extraordinary play, and in the overtures made to him by Mr. Bateman, Mr. Irving believed he saw a possible realisation of his dreams. But there was the uncertainty whether the public favour would sustain him in this new enterprise. As a comedian, no actor was more promising; but how would the world regard a sudden flight into tragedy and poetic drama? Mr. Irving resolved at last on an experiment. If he could but strike the right chord he would be fortified for the great undertaking which filled his thoughts. Without imparting his motive to any one, he recited for the first time, on the occasion of his benefit at the Vaudeville Theatre, "The Dream of Eugene Aram." The audience was

curious and distrustful, but curiosity soon gave way to excitement, and distrust became enthusiasm. The imaginative force of the actor chained his listeners from the first. The frenzy in which the horrible deed was committed, and the agony of the murderer as he unburdened his soul, were acted with a power which was new and strange, and thrilling in its intensity. When the supreme point in the tragic story was reached—

> "As soon as mid-day task was done,
> In secret I was there,
> And a mighty wind had swept the leaves,
> And still the corse was bare"—

the storm of applause assured the actor of the completeness of his triumph. Since that day Mr. Irving's dramatic recital of Hood's weird poem has evoked the enthusiastic plaudits of many audiences; but the interest which it has always excited would have been even greater had the public known that it was virtually the foundation of the actor's fame as a tragedian.

The success of this test of public feeling determined Mr. Irving to go to the Lyceum. This decision caused much astonishment in the profession, nobody being able to imagine why so prosperous an actor should quit a popular theatre

like the Vaudeville for a house which at that time was by no means popular. Mr. Irving kept his own counsel, and the theatrical *quidnuncs* were left in wonder until the course of events explained the mystery. When he accepted an engagement at the Lyceum, Mr. Irving drew the manager's attention to "The Bells," and expressed his belief that much might be made of it; but there was no stipulation on this head. Mr. Irving had then and always the greatest confidence in Mr. Bateman's friendship, and in every respect his trust was amply justified. Public interest in the actor's fortunes at the Lyceum was not, however, at once aroused by a tragic impersonation. Mr. Irving's first performance (September 11, 1871) was his Landry Barbeau in a forgotten play called "Fanchette." On October 23, he appeared as Jingle in Mr. Albery's adaptation from "Pickwick"—the least likely character to be regarded as portending a venture into tragedy. Some months had elapsed since playgoers had been startled by the recital of "The Dream of Eugene Aram." The belief that this wonderful performance heralded a new career for Mr. Irving was not wide-spread, and of the few who entertained it some must have looked upon Jingle as a proof that

the actor had decided to remain in the beaten track. As the ingenious scamp who caused Mr. Pickwick so much concern, Mr. Irving displayed a fertility and a quaintness of comic suggestion which certainly did not foreshadow the guilty fears, the agony, and terrible death of Mathias.

Expectation was at this low ebb when, on the 25th of November, "The Bells" was performed for the first time. The announcement of the play had been received with surprise, for it was well known in literary circles that Mr. Leopold Lewis had offered his manuscript to more than one manager, and had been laughed at for his pains. It was the general opinion of those who claimed authority in such matters that the play could not be acted, the dream scene being supposed to be out of the range of histrionic power possessed by any English actor. Moreover, a version of "The Polish Jew," by Mr. F. C. Burnand, had already been represented at one of the minor theatres noted for melodrama of the deepest dye, and the result had been more diverting than the author intended. But when Mr. Irving played Mathias the affair assumed a very different complexion. The old theatrical phrase, that the actor "took the town by storm," was never more apt than now.

The ghastly story of the conscience-stricken burgomaster was enacted with a tragic force which nothing in the memory of the present generation of playgoers had surpassed. The impression created by the vivid horrors of a murder delineated in a dream, and a death caused by sheer terror, for a time excluded a full consideration of the actor's mastery of realistic detail. In this exhibition of passion Mr. Irving was as thorough an artist as in the delicate minutiæ of comedy. Though Mathias is dominated by one great motive —fear of detection—the character affords a considerable range of varying emotions. Unrepentant as he is—disposed at all times to chuckle over the cunning with which he has concealed his guilt and provided against the contingency of discovery, the man is not inhuman. He loves his wife and child, and feels a bitter pang when he thinks of their innocent confidence. Even when lying in wait for his victim, he struggles with the impulse which urges him to crime. "Kill a man! Kill a man! You'll not do that, Mathias! You'll not do that!" For a moment he shrinks appalled from the devil that possesses his heart. He thanks God with fervour when he fancies that the Jew has escaped him, and that the temptation is removed. Such

traits as these were depicted by Mr. Irving with a skill which seemed to lay bare all the nerves of the man's nature, each quivering with its distinct anguish.

It is hardly necessary to say that only acting of a high order could have assured this play the popularity which it has ever since enjoyed. The British public prefers, in the main, being amused to being terrified; but since 1871 Mr. Irving has made waste paper of so many oracular axioms as to the conditions on which alone an actor's success is possible—just as he has made obsolete some of the dearest traditions of the conventional stage—that it is unsafe to affirm on what prejudices the British public will decide to make a last stand against the persuasions of genius. The drama which, according to the prophets, could not be acted, and which, when it was acted, was said to be too dismal to live long, was played for one hundred and fifty nights in London, and then taken into the provinces, where its success was not less decisive. But, as some ingenious people remarked, Mr. Irving could not play Mathias for ever; and as the season of 1872 drew near, the ravens again sounded their cheerful note. The public was invited to consider how reasonable

it was to assume that, as "The Bells" was a phenomenon, and as phenomenal plays could not be produced every year, Mr. Irving would have to return to the sphere in which he was first known. To them, the ravens, this was a matter of deep regret, but we could not expect to have a comet always with us, and Mr. Irving must be satisfied with having been a comet for a whole season. Having comfortably disposed of him in this way, these judges were much disturbed to learn that this troublesome actor was going to enter an entirely new field. When it was understood that Charles I. was to be Mr. Irving's next impersonation, the birds of pleasing prediction gave way to mirth. They did not want to jest at anybody's expense, but really, the idea of Mr. Irving playing "Charles I." was too much for the gravity of the most decorous raven. If he intended to represent the innate cunning of the King, they could imagine him doing this, though they could not conceive the public enjoying it; but if it were the dignity of the ill-fated monarch, and the pathos of his misfortunes, that Mr. Irving aimed at portraying, why, then they must be excused for croaking immoderately at the prospect of inevitable disaster.

It must be observed that up to this time Mr. Irving had played no part, with the exception, perhaps, of Harry Dornton, of which pathos was a prominent feature. The anguish of Mathias was pathetic, but it was overshadowed by a great wickedness which deprived it of all claim to pity. Characters in which suffering virtue appealed to the sympathy of mankind had hitherto been foreign to Mr. Irving's art. From Bill Sikes to Digby Grant, from brutality to the idolatry of self, he had elaborated only the vices and the weaknesses of humanity. But the reserve of poetic feeling which had been accumulating in his nature demanded an outlet. In Mr. Wills's drama of "Charles I." there was scope for some of the most important qualities which the actor was rapidly developing. Mr. Wills's Charles, though not, perhaps, the Charles of history, is a noble figure, and in nothing did the actor's conception fall short of the beauty of the character. Whether as the affectionate husband, the tender father, the just and upright sovereign wronged, betrayed, and done to death, Mr. Irving realised to the full the ideal set before him. The quality of which above all he was supposed to be devoid was the most striking element of the representation. Charles

in his most kingly moments—in his disdain of Cromwell's dishonourable advances, in his calm reliance on his own rectitude, in his courage in the hour of danger, in his dignity in the midst of ruin—was a study of rare power; but Mr. Irving obtained his finest effects in the most mournful passages of the play. One of these was the speech to the traitor Moray.

"I saw a picture once by a great master:
'Twas an old man's head.
Narrow and evil was its wrinkled brow,
Eyes close and cunning—a dull vulpine smile;
'Twas called a Judas. Wide that artist err'd.
Judas had eyes like thine, of candid blue;
His skin was soft; his hair of stainless gold;
Upon his brow shone the white stamp of truth;
And lips like thine did give the traitor kiss."

But it was in the last parting of Charles with his Queen and children that Mr. Irving gave the strongest proof of his command of the tears of his audience. It may be said with truth that all London was moved by the pathos of that farewell.

"Charles I." was played for nearly seven months, and was followed by a success almost equally great. Indeed, that tide of prosperity was now in full flow, which is without a parallel in modern theatrical history. Mr. Irving had the ball at his

foot at last. A manager devoted to him, and full of enterprise, a theatre in which he was supreme, a public which had welcomed with delight the sudden outbreak of his genius, and which rewarded each new effort with acclamation—these were indeed great conquests. Triumphs, as well as griefs, come in battalions. The actor was no longer confronted by that barrier which is so often impassable—lack of opportunity. With free play for energies which are in themselves remarkable, he was rapidly rising to the level of his gifts. On the 19th of April, 1873, Mr. Irving assumed the principal character in the drama of "Eugene Aram," by the author of "Charles I." In this case everybody anticipated a success, for the nature of the play was akin to Mr. Irving's earliest achievement as a tragic artist. People remembered now how he had recited, or rather acted, Hood's famous poem, and they wondered that they should ever have forgotten it. But as Eugene Aram, Mr. Irving astonished the audience which had come prepared to admire. Mr. Wills had fitted the actor with a fine impersonation, but he had also given him a task of almost unexampled difficulty. There was no repetition of "The Bells." Mathias and Eugene Aram were wholly unlike, though they had a

great crime in common. The burgomaster had murdered a man for his money, and when not haunted by the terrible phantoms conjured up by a fevered brain, exulted over the success with which he had defied justice. The schoolmaster had, according to the dramatist, avenged the dishonour of the woman he loved, and suffered the ever-present remorse of a refined and sensitive nature in the midst of the surroundings of love and respect which attached to an apparently blameless life. The cunning of Mathias delighted in expedients for mitigating the consequences of possible detection. Aram was cast in a higher mould, and there was in him a latent force of will which in sudden danger presented an intrepid front to the enemy of his peace. The advent of a dissolute companion of the murdered man, who threatens to expose Aram on the eve of his marriage with the vicar's daughter, leads to a conflict between intellect and brute audacity, in which the nervous power of the principal actor is displayed with startling effect. When he has only to deal with the ruffian who may denounce him, Aram triumphs by sheer superiority of mind; but the discovery of the skeleton revives all the horror of his deed, and resolution gives way to

conscience. In this transition from courage to despair, Mr. Irving presented a picture of mental agony which was almost unendurable. But something more extraordinary was to follow. The whole of the last act was occupied by Aram's dying confession. For half-an-hour the actor sustained a monologue in which frenzy at the thought of the injuries which had provoked the crime, and the remorse of the departing soul, were painted with singular skill.

The time had now come for an even more distinct assertion of Mr. Irving's claims as a tragedian. It was loudly affirmed that whatever he might have done in plays which had been written for him, he would signally fail if he invited comparison with the great actors of the past in "legitimate drama." Such a challenge must in any case have been accepted, but Mr. Irving had determined on his course long before this challenge was given. Richelieu had been chosen as the character in which he should first claim kindred with his predecessors in tragic art. As far back as "The Bells," the late Lord Lytton himself had suggested this assumption, and had written of the actor in these terms: "Mr. Irving's performance in 'The Bells' is too admirable not to be appreciated

by every competent judge of art, and it will be a sure good fortune to any dramatic author to obtain his representation in some leading part worthy of his study and suited to his powers." But the actor was keenly alive to the gravity of this step. He had to contend against the prepossessions of the playgoers who remembered Macready—prepossessions which strengthened that hostility which every man, an actor above all, has to meet who oversteps the limits confidently assigned to his abilities. This consciousness of the forces arrayed against him, acting upon nerves already highly strung, deprived Mr. Irving's first performance of "Richelieu," on September 27, 1873, of much of its due effect. But with the audience his success was undoubted. More enthusiastic applause had never been heard at the Lyceum. To some, however, who are wont to pronounce a final judgment without waiting to see whether, when suffering no disadvantages, the actor will rise above the level of the first representation, it seemed that Mr. Irving had attempted more than he could perform. It was said that his conception of Richelieu was so subtle that it was beyond his physical ability, or that of any human being, to carry it out. The later perform-

ances extinguished this dictum. Mr. Irving has since accomplished greater things, but his Richelieu remains in many respects his most artistic impersonation. The multiplicity of suggestive detail with which he was at first supposed to have over-weighted the character is now the chief source of its fascination. Some trait in the nature of this wonderful old man, whose figure and aspect are so picturesque, seems expressed by almost every movement of the restless hands, and every light and shade on the imperious brow. In the midst of the varying phases of craft, passion, indomitable will—the sorrowful dignity of the minister in disgrace, the mocking triumph over baffled foes—the age and infirmity of the Cardinal are always preserved. This important point is most noteworthy in the last scene, when Richelieu, apparently in a dying state, confounds his enemies by his sudden renewal of life and energy in the moment of victory. The triumphant exclamation, "There! at my feet!" is not uttered with all the force of the actor's lungs, but in the gasping falsetto of an aged man. Mr. Irving's cultivated sense of comedy enabled him to give to the grim humour of Richelieu a prominence which, it was generally admitted, had

marked few other representations of the character. These great and varied qualities achieved a success which was imperfectly measured by the performance of Lord Lytton's play at the Lyceum for one hundred and twenty nights. In the provinces this impersonation has always been accepted as indisputable evidence of the force of Mr. Irving's originality.

In the latter part of the season of 1873-74 Mr. Irving played Philip in Hamilton Aidë's romantic drama of that name. In this he was on the old ground, though this time the remorse was for a supposed, not an actual murder. A new motive—jealousy—was, however, introduced, and this was invested by Mr. Irving with unusual interest. But, coming between "Richelieu" and "Hamlet" in the actor's career, "Philip" must always be very much in the shade. It was now known that the autumn of 1874 would witness Mr. Irving's appearance as Hamlet, and as the time drew near public excitement reached a white heat. It was agreed on all hands that this experiment in the drama of Shakespeare would decide once for all the question whether Mr. Irving was entitled to be considered a tragedian of the first rank. Subsequently, some effort was made to prove that, after all, success in

Hamlet was no great matter, as it was a part in which young actors were always more or less successful, for the character was in itself so interesting that any one who could speak his lines fairly could not possibly fail in it. Mr. Irving's Hamlet was not the essay of a tyro, but the culminating point of a career in which genius and arduous study had marked every stride. That it was generally regarded as the effort which should make or mar him was shown by the feverish expectation with which the public awaited the event. As early as three o'clock in the afternoon of the 31st of October the crowd began to form at the pit door of the Lyceum. The pit that night was a memorable spectacle. Never had that tribunal been so highly charged with anxiety, impatience, and enthusiasm. The entire audience was an extraordinary assemblage, for the fact that Mr. Irving had set his reputation on a cast which was also to decide whether the times were indeed too degenerate for Shakespeare to be popular, had brought most of the representatives of art and letters to witness the hazard of the die. The actor's welcome was an outburst of unfeigned admiration of the courage with which he was about to grapple with the most difficult and ex-

acting of Shakespearian creations. But for a time the novelty of the conception, and the absolute independence of familiar traditions bewildered the audience. This sad and self-distrustful Hamlet, who gave natural and unforced expression to his thoughts as they occurred to him, instead of delivering a number of unnatural "points" like stones from a catapult, excited a growing interest; but two acts had almost passed before he began to be understood. It may be remarked here, as a striking trait of a conscientious artist, that after the scene with the Ghost Mr. Irving came off the stage depressed, not by the silence of the auditory, but by the thought that he had fallen below his ideal. But when the tender, sympathetic nature of this Hamlet fairly revealed itself, the affections of all were won. It was the most human Hamlet they had ever known. The irresolution of the man was due not so much to intellectual doubt as to kindliness of heart. The strife of emotions in the scene with Ophelia—the passionate tenderness which shone through the ravings of the "antic disposition"—roused the house to enthusiasm which was intensified by the fire of the play-scene. This was the greatest triumph of the night. The hysterical frenzy of Hamlet as he sank into the

chair from which the affrighted king had fled caused a tempest of excitement unparalleled in the experience of the oldest playgoer. The daring and originality of the actor were again conspicuous in the interview with the queen, the most noteworthy feature of which was that Hamlet discarded the customary "counterfeit presentments" and brought home to his mother the contrast between his father and his uncle by real imaginative power. The performance was now one long success. The address to the players charmed every one with its ease and grace; the philosophy and passion in the graveyard sustained the interest at its height, and when the curtain fell upon the consummation of the tragedy, the actor's triumph was beyond all cavil.

The impression created by this great achievement was deep and wide-spread. For many a day newspapers and reviews abounded in dissertations on Mr. Irving's Hamlet or on particular characteristics of it. Everybody found himself quoting "Hamlet" involuntarily. Writers of leading articles suddenly showed a surprising freshness of memory with regard to apposite passages from the play. Numbers of people were heard expressing innocent amazement that so much of our idio-

matic English in constant use was derived from this work of the poet. All over the country "Hamlet" became a subject of study and discussion to many who had previously regarded Shakespeare as a genius to be spoken of with reverence, but very dry and rarely intelligible. Here was an interpreter of the poet who made his innermost meaning plain to all. It seemed as if, having at last found out the inexhaustible beauties of this noble tragedy, the multitude could never weary of them. Mr. Irving had never expected to play Hamlet more than fifty nights. He was the Dane for two hundred.

CHAPTER IV.

SHAKESPEARE AND TENNYSON.

IT is unhappily a commonplace that a man who surprises the world by attaining a position very much above the common estimate of his talents is sure to suffer detraction. Mr. Irving has had more than his share of this unenviable attention. The detractors were very busy at this time, and all the weapons of caricature—much of it of the most brutal kind—were employed to mar the reputation which he had won by sheer originality and honest effort. Some people really persuaded themselves that his success was due, not to his own capacity, but to the phenomenal shrewdness of Mr. Bateman, who in some mysterious way had hocussed the public into believing that Mr. Irving was a great tragedian. Others were filled with alarm and indignation by Mr. Irving's

innovations on the traditional methods of playing Shakespeare; and though they could make no stand against the popularity of his Hamlet, looked for their opportunity in some tragic impersonation less conspicuously suited to his gifts.

This opportunity came when Macbeth was produced at the Lyceum (September 25, 1875). The stage traditions which enveloped the character of the Scottish usurper were far more formidable than those which surrounded Hamlet, though they had accumulated since the days of Edmund Kean, whose interpretation of Macbeth was somewhat different from that which makes the Thane of Cawdor a man of heroic mould. It is curious that the utter prostration of mind which Edmund Kean exhibited after the murder of Duncan was extolled by the critics of his day for its truth, while Mr. Irving, who expressed precisely the same idea of the murderer's remorse, was informed that his Macbeth was too abject for a soldier. Mr. Irving presented, not a bluff, blunt, barbaric warrior, who fears neither man nor ghost, but a man in whom before the play begins, there is a taint of moral poison, which the prophecy of the witches immediately developes into a thought of usurpation by murder; who yet has so much

shrinking from crime that it is the determination of his wife which screws his courage to the sticking-point; who, when the deed is done, is so appalled by the terrors of conscience that his delirious imagination hears an accusing voice, and his partner in guilt reproaches him with his "white heart"; who, hardened in sin, passes from one murder to another, but is terrified by the ghost of Banquo; and who, when the ever-narrowing circle of his fate closes upon him, turns at bay and dies like a soldier. This conception, which is in perfect harmony with the spirit of the play, was the cause of as hot a fight as commentators ever engaged in. Yet the public interest in Mr. Irving's performance enabled him to play Macbeth for eighty nights; and this impersonation will always be remembered by those who owe to him some of their keenest intellectual pleasure, if only for the melancholy music of some of the soliloquies.[1]

"Macbeth" was succeeded by "Othello" (February 14, 1876), and in this tragedy it must be admitted that Mr. Irving's first essay was by no means equal to his second. Indeed, his later Othello cannot take rank with his Hamlet and

[1] *See* Appendix.

Shylock; but it is in many respects a very fine performance. When Mr. Irving first played Othello he was picturesque, as he always is, and in the last act his representation of Othello's sacrifice of Desdemona was singularly true and moving; but the exaggeration of vehemence in some passages marred the effect of the impersonation as a whole. There was at this time a reaction against his method, which to some people seemed likely to be fatal. One authority announced with much self-satisfaction that Mr. Irving's experiments in Shakespeare were at an end, and all lovers of sound acting were bidden to rejoice over the failure of so audacious an innovator. But though Mr. Irving had received a check, he was not daunted. Two Shakespearian revivals were enough for one season, and "Othello" was withdrawn to make way for Mr. Tennyson's "Queen Mary." In this play Mr. Irving sustained the character of Philip II. of Spain. It afforded little scope for his most striking qualities, but the kingly callousness of the great monarch who recites to Mary the roll of his possessions pretty much like a purse-proud parvenu enumerating his country seats, was sketched with many admirable strokes of art. "Queen Mary" was not a good acting play, and probably will

never be seen again; but everybody remembers, with a kind of shiver, Mr. Irving's tone of highbred heartlessness, when Philip turns from the unhappy woman who is craving for his love to his minister and familiar: "Simon, is supper ready?"

As Mr. Tennyson's drama failed to attract the town, Mrs. Bateman, who after her husband's sudden death had assumed the management of the theatre, revived "The Bells" and "The Belle's Stratagem," much to the joy of Mr. Irving's most hostile critics, who flattered themselves that, convinced of the error of his ways, the actor had decided to return to comedy. Mathias, it is true, is not a comic character; but the reappearance of Doricourt promised the return of Jingle and Digby Grant, and the rest of the characters to which Mr. Irving's most candid friends were anxious that he should confine himself. But it was not a very good sign of penitence that at the end of the season he departed into the provinces, and persisted in playing Hamlet to immense assemblages in the principal cities of the United Kingdom. Moreover, he was everywhere received with the utmost enthusiasm. During his stay at Manchester it was estimated that nearly eighteen thousand people visited the theatre. In Dublin he was both a

popular and an academical success. He became the idol of the students of Trinity College, and the heads of that institution chose an unusual method of signifying their admiration. Mr. Irving was presented with an illuminated address, one passage in which expressed with marked felicity the influence he has exercised upon the stage. "To the most careful students of Shakespeare you have, by your scholarly and original interpretation, revealed new depths of meaning in 'Hamlet,' and aroused in the minds of all a fresh interest in our highest poetry. Acting such as yours ennobles and elevates the stage, and serves to restore it to its true function as a potent instrument for intellectual and moral culture. Throughout your too brief engagement our stage has been a school of true art, a purifier of the passions, and a nurse of heroic sentiments; you have even succeeded in commending it to the favour of a portion of society, large and justly influential, who usually hold aloof from the theatre." It would be difficult to expound more forcibly and concisely Mr. Irving's claims to the esteem of his contemporaries. He has never received a more convincing testimony to the truth and power of his interpretation of Shakespeare. Here was a body of cultivated men,

probably as deep in Shakespearian lore as most of the commentators. They knew the poet in the study. They had often seen him represented on the stage. But such was the originality and freshness of Mr. Irving's impersonation of Hamlet, so subtly did his portraiture correspond to the student's ideas of that complex character, and yet, at the same time, so easy, natural, and essentially human was the entire conception, that they could not help feeling profoundly grateful to the man who, as it were, had made an intellectual abstraction live and breathe like one of themselves.

The opening of the Lyceum season of 1877 was marked by what somebody called the rehabilitation of Mr. Irving as a Shakespearian actor. His performance of Richard III. made it clear that his force of character and fertility of resource were more than a match for his own errors of judgment, and for the ingenuity of his detractors. He took a bold line at once by discarding Colley Cibber's acting version of the tragedy. Nearly all his predecessors had been content to declaim the rubbish which Cibber and his contemporaries believed to be an improvement upon Shakespeare. This, at all events, is a tradition which Mr. Irving has utterly destroyed. No actor who appeals to educated

society will ever again venture to play the Richard of Mr. Cibber. It may be necessary to curtail Shakespeare's plays for representation, but, at least, we may be sure of having the original text, and not the ridiculous inventions of the days when the poet was only half understood.

On the first night of "King Richard III." Mr. Irving was presented by Mr. Chippendale with the sword of Edmund Kean. He also received subsequently from Dr. Canton the Order of St. George, worn by the same great actor in the part of Richard. Not the least amongst these mementoes of the illustrious dead, of whom he was regarded as the natural heir, was the ring of David Garrick, the gift of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. On this is the following inscription: "This ring, once Mr. Garrick's, is presented by the Baroness Burdett-Coutts to Mr. Henry Irving, in recognition of the gratification derived from his Shakespearian representations, uniting to many characteristics of his great predecessor in histrionic art (whom he is too young to remember) the charm of original thought, giving delineations of new forms of dramatic interest, power, and beauty." Mr. Irving's Richard aptly illustrated this "charm of original thought," for anything more remote from the

audacious knave who had hitherto passed for Shakespeare's Gloster could not be conceived. Though Richard had resolved to be a villain, he did not, in Mr. Irving's opinion, always carry his villainy in his countenance, so that everybody who ran might read it, or rather might read it and then find it expedient to run. The scene with Lady Anne which, as usually represented, was an insult to common sense, became under Mr. Irving's treatment credible and even probable. This Richard played the lover with an ardour and persistency which might well have beguiled a foolish girl. So artistic was this assumed earnestness that the sudden transition to mocking exultation when the deceiver's object is gained and he is alone, had all the interest of a surprise to an audience familiar enough with the sequence of events. The profound dissimulation of Richard was again strikingly manifested in the scene in which he affects sanctity and a reluctance to accept the crown. Here occurred one of those fine suggestions which are characteristic of Mr. Irving's acting, and in thinking of which we recall Hamlet turning to cast a lingering gaze at the spot where his father's spirit had told its awful tale, or sinking into the king's chair after the

play-scene. Richard, feigning to be persuaded by the solicitations of the citizens, raises the prayer-book to his face, and behind that screen smiles cynical triumph at Buckingham. One noteworthy feature of this impersonation was that Richard, albeit deformed, had all the royal bearing of a Plantagenet. He did not halt about the stage looking like a lame ape. In the latter part of the tragedy, Mr. Irving was not so impressive as in the earlier scenes, but the death of Richard was a fine piece of acting. It was a singular proof of the tragedian's influence over the imagination that in the tent-scene, before Richard has the vision, he paced the stage, warmed his hands at the fire, and leisurely studied a map of the battle-field, in a silence which lasted several minutes, and yet seemed only to deepen the attention of the audience.

On May 19, Mr. Irving undertook the dual characters of Lesurques and Dubosc in Charles Reade's version of the celebrated drama of the "Courrier de Lyons." This is probably the most remarkable of all stories of mistaken identity which have been transferred to the stage, and it afforded Mr. Irving an opportunity of showing his grasp of two natures opposite as the poles, but connected

by a fatality of physical resemblance which nearly causes an innocent man to suffer for the crime of an assassin. In the scene in which Lesurques is urged by his father to commit suicide in order to escape the infamy of the scaffold, and that in which Dubosc, gloating over the expected execution of his victim, is caught in a trap, Mr. Irving acted with a dramatic force which made the "Lyons Mail" the most popular melodrama of the time. In the midst of this success the actor paid a visit to Dublin and gave a reading, comprising "The Dream of Eugene Aram," and scenes from "Othello" and "King Richard III.," at Trinity College. The most brilliant season of the Lyceum since that of 1874–75 was brought to a close on the 30th of July, when Mr. Irving played Hamlet for his benefit, to an audience which testified by numbers and sympathy that his popularity was, if possible, greater than ever.

It needed little knowledge of Mr. Irving's powers to predict for him a decided success in the character of Louis XI., in which he appeared on March 9, 1878. Delavigne's play is too gloomy to be popular. It presents the phenomenon of a first act without the principal figure of the drama. It has no female interest to speak of;

and there is practically only one scene during which it is possible for an audience to feel lighthearted. But Mr. Irving's Louis must always remain one of the most brilliant examples of one side of his art. Hypocrisy, cunning, cruelty, and grim humour have rarely been painted with more vivid force, or a more skilful distribution of colour. The sudden transitions of the despot's mind — the varying malignity, fawning *bonhomie*, distrust, abject fear and rage—are depicted by Mr. Irving with endless variety of illustration. Then the death is probably the most wonderful of the actor's many deaths. No painter of the terrible could produce a more weird and ghastly figure than that of the dying Louis in his royal robes, slowly rising and stretching out a skinny hand to the shoulder of the boy who thinks himself King of France. In this performance, as in others, time did much to mature and mellow Mr. Irving's art, and his later Louis, like his later Hamlet, shows a remarkable advance upon the first essay.

Much as "Louis XI." has done for Mr. Irving's reputation, it was not a play to fascinate the public, and the novelty which succeeded it had not the advantage of giving the actor a character worthy of his talents. On June 8th was produced a

melodrama by Messrs. W. G. Wills and Percy Fitzgerald, founded on the legend of the *Flying Dutchman*, and entitled "Vanderdecken." The new play proved to be painfully flimsy. A good dramatic story might be made out of the idea of the phantasmal mariner who was released from his awful doom by the love of the Danish maiden; but in "Vanderdecken" Mr. Irving had little opportunity save that of making an impressive entrance, the suddenness of which did something to sustain the Flying Dutchman's ghostly character. But the recollection of seeing the tragedian thrown up by the waves after he had been apparently hurled from a rock is not pleasant to the playgoer who likes to associate Mr. Irving with some of his most intellectual recreations.

"Vanderdecken" has an interest, however, which is not due to its intrinsic merits. It marked the close of another stage in Mr. Irving's career. He had realised the dream which at one time seemed so foolish—the dream of finding a manager with enterprise enough to launch him into the higher drama. But he had never even dreamt in the early days of becoming a manager himself, and of reigning supreme over a theatre where all his most cherished ideas of dramatic representation

should attain complete and successful fruition. Yet this was what now came to pass. A difference of opinion between Mrs. Bateman and Mr. Irving as to the recruiting of the Lyceum company led to the retirement of the former from the management, which was left entirely in Mr. Irving's hands. To the public the event was one of those dramatic surprises which have so often served to give a fresh stimulus to curiosity about Mr. Irving's destiny. Had he been privileged to order his own fate he could scarcely have given it more unexpected turns than have been supplied by the hand of Providence. Public interest in his future rose higher than ever. He had made a great reputation as an actor—would he succeed as a manager, or fail like Macready and Charles Kean? There was a general belief that actor-managers were unfitted for the dual vocation, and that the temperament of the artist was incompatible with the business qualities needed by the head of a commercial undertaking. Some notable precedents were certainly against Mr. Irving, but he had successfully defied precedent already; and the new phase of his life which now opened was destined to give him the greatest triumph of all.

CHAPTER V.

ACTOR AND MANAGER.

THE first act of the new manager was a great stroke of generalship. This was the engagement of Miss Ellen Terry. No actress more perfectly fitted to be the chief coadjutor of an actor with Mr. Irving's artistic aims could have been found. Miss Terry already enjoyed a high reputation. Her Mabel Vane in "Masks and Faces," and Portia in "The Merchant of Venice," at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, in spite of the grievous failure of Mr. Bancroft's excursion into Shakespeare, had brought her no small credit; while her Lilian Vavasour in "New Men and Old Acres," and, above all, Olivia, in Mr. Wills's play of that name, were undoubtedly amongst the most delightful impersonations in modern drama. A mingled grace and vivacity, and a simple pathos unrivalled on the stage, would have made Miss Terry an acqui-

sition to any theatre; but the opportunities of distinction, of which she has availed herself to the utmost at the Lyceum, could scarcely have been commanded elsewhere.

December 30, 1878, was the first night of Mr. Irving's new enterprise, and a remarkable occasion it was. The play was "Hamlet," and though Mr. Irving's impersonation of the Danish prince was familiar to everybody, it derived a fresh interest from its surroundings which gave it the importance of a new study. Hitherto "Hamlet" had been mounted—to use a vile but convenient phrase—without any particular regard to scenic accessories. Mr. Irving now made it clear that, in his opinion, homage to Shakespeare on the stage was not incompatible with the judicious employment of pictorial arts to represent the local habitation of the play. So a pleasant harmony of colour—especially in the churchyard and in the last scene of all—greeted the eye on this eventful evening. Naturally there were some people who were not pleased. One ingenious being, offended by a hall partially open to the garden, and disclosing the foliage beyond, suggested that when Hamlet ordered the doors to be locked, everybody might jump over the wall. But this idea did not

appear to mar the enjoyment of the audience on the first night. Miss Ellen Terry's Ophelia was a charm which bewitched the house; and often as the present writer has witnessed the famous interview between Ophelia and Hamlet, the pathetic injunction, "Get thee to a nunnery," has never moved him so deeply as it did that night.

"Hamlet" was played for 108 nights, and was followed on April 17, 1879, by "The Lady of Lyons." Claude Melnotte cannot be ranked amongst Mr. Irving's best impersonations. Many an inferior actor might be much more at home as the rhetorical but commonplace lover of Lord Lytton's play. Mr. Irving's versatility is remarkable; but it is no disparagement to his art to say that, though he can be many things by turns, he cannot be the lover who is perpetually in transports about his mistress' eyebrow. Yet it is equally true that Mr. Irving can play nothing without finding some outlet, narrow though it be, for the force of his personality. His Claude on the first night was not good; but in later performances he was able to impart a manly vigour to the character, which in some scenes, notably when Claude surrenders his authority over his newly-wedded wife, was very effective.

The remainder of the season was occupied with revivals of "Eugene Aram," "Richelieu," "Louis XI.," "Charles I.," "The Bells," and "The Lyons Mail." On the last night Mr. Irving announced his intention of presenting in the following season some of the old plays which had pleased our grandfathers—"The Stranger," "The Gamester," and "The Iron Chest." This resolution was very luckily modified by events. His summer holiday was spent by Mr. Irving in a Mediterranean cruise in the Baroness Burdett-Coutts's yacht, and the poetry of Italy seems to have turned his thoughts irresistibly towards "The Merchant of Venice." It is true that on his return he so far fulfilled his pledge as to produce "The Iron Chest" (Sept. 27, 1879), which served well enough as a stop-gap, but could not possibly have proved a permanent addition to the Lyceum repertory. Sir Edward Mortimer is a remorseful murderer, but the character presented no special features to distinguish it from the more impressive embodiments of the same class in which Mr. Irving had established his early fame. As for "The Stranger" and "The Gamester," they were, happily for Mr. Irving's friends, left in oblivion. They belong to the stilted order of romantic drama which may

have been delightful to our grandfathers, but is painfully silly and unreal to the present generation.

But Mr. Irving was now to receive convincing proof that his shield and buckler as a manager must always be the Shakespearian drama. "The Merchant of Venice" was produced on November 1 with complete success. Mr. Irving's Shylock was one of his most original efforts. He looked a Jew of the Jews, and the power of his imagination was never more forcibly illustrated than by his realisation of the racial instinct which dominates the vindictive usurer. The whole Hebrew community was in ecstasies. Never before had Shylock, while feeding fat the ancient grudge of his people against the Christians, appealed more strongly to the sympathies of all. It may have been that Mr. Irving sublimated the Jew a little too much. As Shylock left the court crushed and humbled, the glance of noble scorn he cast upon his tormentor Gratiano banished all the repugnance inspired by the malignant insistence on the pound of flesh, and made the Jew the hero of the scene. Here occurred one of those ingenious devices which prove how thoroughly Mr. Irving enters into the spirit of his author, and how his fertile fancy plays like an electric flame upon the text, throwing the

conventional stage directions into the shade. After Shylock's exit, one heard the roar of execration from the crowd in the street, growing fainter and fainter in the distance. Another inventive touch of the same kind was the unexpected rising of the curtain after Jessica's elopement, to disclose the Jew, unwitting of his loss, returning to his deserted home. It is such illustrations as these which are the despair of some of Mr. Irving's critics. They cannot say that these points do not help the illusion; but they affect to despise as trivial the ingenuity which produces them. Yet it is no small part of Mr. Irving's credit that he does not disdain the minutest detail if it serves to illustrate the poet's intent; and the sum of these minutiæ has done much to make Shakespeare so real and vivid to the modern playgoer.

True to his policy of giving as much of the poet as possible, Mr. Irving was careful not to follow the pestilent custom of omitting the fifth act of the comedy. What Mr. Irving has done for the restoration of Shakespeare may be profitably pondered by the people who are always bewailing the mutilation of the bard on the stage, and the sumptuousness of modern scenery. The scenic effects of "The Merchant of Venice"

grievously troubled the minds of those who hold that when a play occurs in Venice the scenery should suggest Venetian life as little as possible. Mr. Irving's object was to produce a series of harmonious pictures which should transport the imagination to Venice, enable one in spirit to tread the Rialto with Shylock, accompany Bassanio to Belmont, and watch the perfect moon with Jessica and Lorenzo. All this was attained without any sacrifice of the dramatic force of the play to the sensuousness of the eye.

"The Merchant of Venice" was played for two hundred and fifty nights, the longest representation of any Shakespearian play. It had been one of Mr. Irving's designs when he became a manager to present several plays for a limited number of nights every season; but as he plaintively remarked in one of his speeches, the public would persist in coming in such numbers, and with such unflagging interest to see one production, that he was obliged to defer to the popular wish, and keep a play on the boards for months instead of weeks. Towards the close of this representation of "The Merchant of Venice," the comedy was supplemented by Mr. Wills's "Iolanthe," a version of Herz's "King René's Daughter." In Sir Theo-

dore Martin's adaptation of this poem, Mr. Irving had already, some years before, played Count Tristan to the Iolanthe of Miss Helen Faucit. Miss Terry's impersonation of the blind girl was distinguished by all her exquisite sensibility, and afforded a contrast to the piquant vivacity of her Portia. Mr. Irving's Tristan was one of his not wholly satisfactory lovers.

The season which opened on September 18, 1880, was signalised by a return to melodrama. In the "Corsican Brothers," Mr. Irving utilised that element of weirdness which forms no small part of his fascination. Probably the ghostly legends to which he listened when a boy in Cornwall had given his imagination that bias towards the supernatural which he knows so well how to turn to picturesque account. The dual characters of Fabien and Louis dei Franchi gave no employment to his higher faculties as an actor, but the performance was undeniably powerful in the scene of Fabien's revenge upon Chateau Renaud for his brother's death, and the whole play made a stronger appeal to that love of the mysterious in human affinities like those between the twin brothers, than many people cared to admit.

Original plays have not been numerous at the Lyceum, and in the five years of his management Mr. Irving has produced only one, if we except comediettas like Mr. Pinero's "Daisy's Escape," and "Bygones." The one original play is Mr. Tennyson's drama of "The Cup." This was presented for the first time on January 3, 1881, and met with a fate very different from that of "Queen Mary." There was a much stronger dramatic fibre in "The Cup," than in the Laureate's earlier effort. The supernatural element was strong at the Lyceum this season, for the most impressive episode in "The Cup," Camma's invocation of the goddess Artemis which was answered by a clap of thunder, was fully as moving as the ghost in "The Corsican Brothers." The Temple of Artemis was a remarkable triumph of stage art. The solid roof and pillars gave such deep offence to the imaginative soul of Mr. Hollingshead that, rather more than two years and a half later, he solemnly protested against them in *The Fortnightly Review;* and to give emphasis to his protest, a solid glass mirror in one of his own theatres shortly afterwards fell on the stage and nearly killed a few innocent comedians. Mr. Irving's explanation would probably be, that if

your author demands a temple (which is certainly more poetical than a cab or a fire engine) you had better give him as real a structure as the exigencies of the stage will permit. The success of "The Cup" did not, however, depend simply on its architecture. Mr. Irving's Synorix was a grim portrayal of an unscrupulous barbarian; and though it was hard to fancy Miss Terry poisoning anybody, the triumph of Camma over her husband's slayer, whom she has beguiled to his doom in the very hour when crowned with laurel, he comes amidst the temple rites to claim her as his bride, only to writhe in his last agony at her feet, will not easily be forgotten.

But all this was eclipsed by another entertainment, the announcement of which filled everybody with surprise, and not a few with incredulity. The opening of the new Princess's Theatre had been celebrated by the appearance of Mr. Edwin Booth, after a lapse of many years since his former visit to England. Provided with not too strong a company, Mr. Booth had made a manful struggle at the Princess's, winning warm encomiums from the most intelligent playgoers by some of his best impersonations. "How fine it would be to see Booth and Irving play together!"

was a common exclamation of people who contrasted Mr. Booth's surroundings at the Princess's with the perfection of detail which distinguished the Lyceum. One morning the town was electrified to learn that Mr. Edwin Booth had been engaged to play Othello and Iago alternately with Mr. Irving. This was the greatest surprise of all; and Mr. Irving's bitterest assailants acknowledged with a groan, when the news was verified, that his tact as a manager amounted to genius. Though the Lyceum prices were raised considerably for the nights of Mr. Booth's engagement, the public interest was unchecked. The opportunity of comparing two such eminent actors on the same stage was an unexampled treat for the London playgoer. On May 2, 1881, "Othello" was produced, with Mr. Booth as the Moor, Mr. Irving as Iago, and Miss Terry as Desdemona. It would be invidious to apportion the honours of a performance distinguished by such remarkable and general excellence. Perhaps the greatest interest attached to Mr. Irving's Iago, as this was his first appearance in that character. The qualities he had already shown in his Richard III. and Louis XI. made it certain that his Iago would be marked by intellectual force; but the

spirit and originality of the embodiment fairly won most of his unfriendly critics. They were carried away by the brilliant devilry of the whole performance. There was the soldierly frankness which made the appellation, "honest Iago," so natural. Never did a fiend wear so engaging a mask, and the careless freedom with which this Iago ate grapes was even made a source of complaint by some writers, who persuaded themselves that for Iago to eat grapes when he was meditating murder was too horrible a mockery. Mr. Irving's genius for soliloquy was most happily displayed in this impersonation, especially in the remarkable speech in which Iago unfolds his plan. As he recited these terrible lines:

> "And by how much she strives to do him good,
> She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
> So will I turn her virtue into pitch;
> And out of her own goodness make the net
> That shall enmesh them all"—

with a gesture which marvellously expressed the potency of this spirit of malignity, his figure seemed an appalling incarnation of an all-embracing hate.

There was no less interest in the representation of the tragedy when Mr. Booth played Iago to Mr. Irving's Othello. Very different, as I have already

said, was this Moor from Mr. Irving's first impersonation of the character. There was a much greater command of the actor's resources, greater repose and dignity, a strength, in short, which lifted the performance altogether out of the category of failures, if not into the category of marked successes. Mr. Booth's acting fully sustained his great reputation, and Miss Terry's Desdemona was a most pathetic figure. Moreover, the subordinate characters were excellently represented, and it is doubtful whether the tragedy has at any time received more uniformly adequate interpretation.

Mr. Booth's engagement was unfortunately brief, "Othello" being played three nights a week, and twenty-two times in all; but it will always remain one of the brightest episodes in modern theatrical annals. "The Corsican Brothers," which had uninterrupted sway for some months, was performed 190 times, and "The Cup" 127. This season, which closed on July 23, was certainly as brilliant as the heart of manager could desire. It was a remarkable season, moreover, for Mr. Irving's individual work, for he appeared in no fewer than five new impersonations—Fabien and Louis dei Franchi, Synorix, Iago, and Modus in

"The Hunchback." Modus was played only twice—once at Mr. Toole's theatre, and again at the Lyceum on the last night of the season; and though the scene represented was the brief one between Helen and Modus, in which the student abandons Ovid's "Art of Love" for a more agreeable instructor, it served to show that Mr. Irving had not lost his touch of playful comedy, nor Miss Terry her delightful archness.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OLD TALISMAN AND THE NEW.

ONE afternoon in the season of 1880–81 there was a performance of "Two Roses" at the Lyceum for the benefit of Mr. William Belford. It was ten years since Mr. Irving had played Digby Grant, and his reappearance in the character gave much satisfaction to playgoers who were never weary of extolling the days when he used to shine in modern comedy. They were more joyful still when it was announced that Mr. Albery's play would be revived at the Lyceum at the opening of the new season which began on December 26, 1881, after Mr. Irving and his company had made a successful tour in the provinces. Mr. Irving had the assistance of that excellent comedian, Mr. David James, who resumed his original part of the genial bagman; but the revival was not popular.

The lapse of ten years had dulled the edge of Mr. Albery's wit. His play was originally produced at a time when the Robertsonian comedy was at its zenith; but since then the public had acquired a taste for a much more robust entertainment. There could have been no more signal evidence of the immense change in public sentiment effected by Mr. Irving than the comparative failure of "Two Roses." The Digby Grant was an even more artistically elaborate portrait than ever, but it was generally felt that the art expended on the character was out of all proportion to the value of the material.

But it was March 11, 1882, which saw the event of the season. "Romeo and Juliet" was produced with greater pictorial effect than the tragedy had ever commanded before. Mr. Irving's capacity as a stage-manager was never seen to more advantage, and the partisans of Montague and Capulet broke one another's heads with a realism which deeply gratified every lover of a good stage fight. The scenery, notably the view from Juliet's balcony, and the family vault of the Capulets, was rich and harmonious in the highest degree. If the dramatic representation fell considerably short of ideal perfection, it still possessed no little

merit. Miss Terry's Juliet was said to lack power, but the sweet girlishness of the early scenes was admirably represented, and the varying emotions which precede the drinking of the potion cannot often have been depicted with finer fancy, or more perfect naturalness of anxiety and terror. A better representative of the Nurse than Mrs. Stirling could not have been found. But as Romeo, Mr. Irving could not have contented any of his admirers. Many a more difficult and complex character he has mastered, but the element of boyish passion was scarcely within his resources. When the sudden energy of will, as in the duel with Tybalt, or the profound calm of despair, as in the scene with the Apothecary, was the theme, Mr. Irving rose to the height of his qualities. But in the love-making, though his subtle art was manifested in many a pregnant look and intonation, he could not always maintain his hold upon his audience.

So much however of real beauty was there in this representation of the loves and woes of Juliet and her Romeo that the play was performed one hundred and sixty times. But the next production at the Lyceum was far more welcome to the mass of Mr. Irving's friends. Shakespeare's

delightful comedy of "Much Ado About Nothing" was played for the first time on October 11, 1882, and may without exaggeration be described as the most perfect theatrical entertainment this generation has ever seen. Mr. Irving's Benedick was distinguished by some of his happiest humour. When the young playgoer of to-day is the veteran playgoer of twenty or thirty years hence, and recites his theatrical recollections to an admiring circle not yet born, or still in the nursery, he will have much to say of the acting of Henry Irving and Ellen Terry in "Much Ado About Nothing." He will chuckle over the wonderful scene in which Benedick, hiding in the arbour, is gulled by his friends into believing that Beatrice is dying for love of him; and will recall the marvellous expression of mingled surprise and ecstasy which illuminated the features of the actor as he walked down the stage, bewildered by the revelation. Some writer has tried to estimate how much of his success Mr. Irving owes to his face. His power of commanding an audience without uttering a word has rarely been more signally illustrated than in the pause before Benedick begins that remarkable piece of reasoning which ends with the incontrovertible proposition that "the world

must be peopled." But in a performance of such high and varied excellence it is difficult to single out passages of exceptional merit. Benedick was fortunately mated with a Beatrice of unequalled charm and vivacity. Nor was the serious interest of the play obscured by the exhilarating comedy of its leading personages. The great scene in the church in which Claudio repudiates Hero was powerfully played. No scenic art had been spared to make this incident impressive; and the magnificence of the altar, the swelling strains of the organ, and all the appurtenances of a solemn ceremony were rendered with such completeness that there was some fear lest the religious susceptibilities of a portion of the community should be wounded. Some people thought that the love passage between Benedick and Beatrice in this scene was inconsistent with the sacred surroundings; but the answer was that Shakespeare had laid the whole scene in a church, and in a church it ought therefore to be played. Others complained that the Friar was not dressed in a garb in which a marriage would be performed by the officiating priest; but Mr. Irving had stopped short of this realism out of deference to the susceptibilities that were supposed to be en-

dangered. On the whole, however, there probably never was a representation of Shakespeare at which there was so little cavil. The comedy was keenly appreciated by many playgoers by whom the poet is commonly treated with distant respect. "The fact is," wrote Mr. Irving in *Good Words*, "that Shakespeare is as modern as any playwright of our time. The delightful humour of 'Much Ado About Nothing' is as highly relished as the best comedy of our own life and manners." This was not a whit more than the truth; and it was the truth because the actor-manager of the Lyceum had caught the spirit of the dramatist, imbued his coadjutors with it, and diffused it throughout the minutest details of the representation. And that is why every man left that theatre at the end of the play feeling that he had tasted the whipped cream of intellectual recreation.

There is no reason to suppose that "Much Ado About Nothing" could not have been played for a year or more with unabated popularity. It was withdrawn after 212 performances only to make way for the rest of the plays which Mr. Irving had chosen for representation in America. Extraordinary care was spent on these revivals. All the

old characters in which Mr. Irving had won so much fame, Hamlet, Shylock, Charles I., Louis XI., Eugene Aram, Lesurques, Dubosc, Mathias, and Doricourt, were elaborated with fresh and vivid touches, which in some cases amounted to a fresh development of the actor's art. This was very notable in "Hamlet." It was most interesting to those who were familiar with this truly great impersonation to mark how Mr. Irving had strengthened and harmonised its proportions. If there used to be any part of the performance in which the interest was unequal it was in the first two acts. Now, however, these were played with surpassing ease and mastery, especially the difficult scene—partly omitted when "Hamlet" was first produced at the Lyceum—in which the Prince swears Horatio and Marcellus to secrecy, while the Ghost solemnly repeats the adjuration under their feet. The play-scene seemed now to have gained in intensity, and, indeed, all the innumerable beauties of the impersonation were mellowed by the actor's ripened judgment. Scarcely less conspicuous was the improvement in his Louis XI., always a strong part, but now more picturesquely grim and terrible than ever. The profoundly conscientious earnestness of Mr.

Irving's art was never more striking than in these farewell performances.

One curious reminiscence of the old days was afforded when Mr. Irving played Robert Macaire in a performance given in aid of the funds of the Royal College of Music. Mr. Toole was the Jacques Strop, and the two actors entered with the greatest relish into the wild farce which they had played together many years before. But the audience was not altogether comfortable. To see Mr. Irving rollicking through comic business, which was strongly suggestive of a harlequinade, was trying to people who were accustomed to associate him with their dramatic ideals. A kind of forced smile played round the house. Nobody liked to blame the public favourite for indulging in these antiquated high-jinks for one afternoon; but had he proposed to play them nightly there would have been a serious remonstrance. Mr. Irving might pass from Charles I. to Robert Macaire, as Garrick passed from Lear to Abel Drugger, without feeling anything but enjoyment in the elasticity of power which made such a transition possible; but the great mass of playgoers whom he had taught to take the drama seriously could not follow him in this somersault.

CHAPTER VII.

HONOURS AND FAREWELLS.

THE announcement that Mr. Irving was about to undertake a tour in America, together with the principal members of his company, and that, moreover, he proposed to take with him everything that had stamped his management of the Lyceum as the most complete theatrical organisation of modern times, profoundly stirred the whole dramatic world. What would the American public think of the foremost English actor? What would be their verdict on the system he had created?

As the time for Mr. Irving's departure drew near, the interest in his enterprise attained such volume that it was generally felt that, whatever the judgment of America might be, England should leave nothing undone to show that the actor carried with him the highest passport the good-will of his countrymen could give. It was

decided that the best form this commendation could take was a farewell banquet at St. James's Hall, the date of which was fixed appropriately enough for the 4th of July. The committee of organisation included Mr. Gladstone and some of his colleagues in the Cabinet. The Lord Chief Justice of England consented to preside at the dinner, and Mr. Russell Lowell readily recognised how fitting a compliment would be the presence on such an occasion of the chief representative of American culture. The only drawback to the success of the arrangements was the impossibility of satisfying everybody who wanted to take part in this tribute to Mr. Irving. The indefatigable secretary of the committee, Mr. Edward Pinches, performed wonders, but a miracle was needed to fill with joy, not to mention dinner, the 3000 applicants for 500 seats. A banquet on a great scale is always an unwieldy affair; but the 3000 would have gladly sat on their thumbs, and eaten bread and cheese, if they could only have got into the hall, and swelled the enthusiastic greeting to the actor when he stood up to express his heartfelt pride in so remarkable a demonstration.

It was significant of the completeness with which Mr. Irving has conquered the religious

prejudices against the stage, that although no representative of the clergy was present at this dinner, letters acknowledging the actor's great services were sent by the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of Durham, the latter prelate being especially warm in his commendation. It was a pity that no dignitary of the Church made a point of joining in person in this testimonial to Mr. Irving, especially as men like Canon Farrar and Canon Liddon have not hesitated to show in other ways their appreciation of the great work done at the Lyceum. Even more to be regretted was the compulsory absence of the Prime Minister, who has always taken a keen interest in the drama, and who showed his esteem for Mr. Irving some years ago by introducing himself to the actor with frank impulsiveness when they happened to meet one day in the street.

But the presence of Lord Coleridge, of the Lord Chancellor of Ireland, and five other judges, of Mr. Lowell, Professor Tyndall, Mr. Alma Tadema, and a host of representatives of all that is brilliant in literature and art, made the gathering in every sense reflective of the best intelligence of the day. Few men are better fitted than the Lord Chief Justice to express in chaste and polished diction

the homage offered by culture to a great actor. Especially happy was Lord Coleridge's plea that the master-interpreters of a great dramatist are entitled to share his immortality. "The master of music, Mozart or Beethoven, is dead and gone without artists to interpret him; and so the dramatist, be he ever so great, is dead and gone if he cannot find an actor to breathe life into the creations of his brain and to make them live and walk across the stage. I do not speak of students of literature, of course, but what does the outside world know of most dramatists, except Shakespeare, and perhaps, at a great distance, Sheridan? and yet Ben Jonson, Marlowe, Ford, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Webster were all great men; but they are all men unknown to the world and their plays are seldom acted. If you reverse the picture, a great actor will often keep alive by a few scenes from a play, or by a single play or two, a great number of men inferior to those whom I have mentioned; and, further, a great actor is as immortal as the author whose genius he so much helps to create. I do not know that I can accept as true the marvellous verses in Westminster Abbey in which we are told that—

'Shakespeare and Garrick like twin stars shall shine,
And earth irradiate with a beam divine.'

But however absurd and extravagant these lines may be, it is nevertheless certainly true that the names of great actors live almost as long as the names of great dramatists—that the name of Garrick, for example, will live nearly as long, probably, as the name of Shakespeare, Roscius as Terence, Talma as Racine, Polus as Sophocles. More than this, the genius of a great actor lifts him into absolute equality with the first personages of his time. Polus was the intimate friend of Sophocles and Euripides, and Garrick was the chosen friend of Burke and Dr. Johnson. Kemble lived in intimacy with Sir Walter Scott and with the king, and Mr. Irving is the friend of this great company. To us he is the last of a line of great names—Burbidge, Betterton, Booth, Garrick, Kean, the Kembles, Young, and Macready. The list is inexhaustible, and, if it were not, I have no power to exhaust it. And what is true of actors is of course true of actresses also. England has a roll of great actresses of which any nation may be proud, and if on this occasion I select one name from this list of fair women, and that the name of Ellen Terry, it is not that I forget Mrs. Siddons, Miss O'Neil, Mrs. Stirling, or many other great women living and passed away."

Of the debt which admirers of Shakespeare owe to Mr. Irving, Lord Coleridge spoke in the warmest terms; and he was careful to emphasise the purity of purpose which has ever distinguished Mr. Irving's ambition, whether as actor or manager. "Moreover, as far as the example and the influence of one man can do it, he has done much, to use an expression of the Bishop of Durham, to purify and exalt the dramatic art. On this matter do not let me be misunderstood. I do not mean to say that in this particular work Mr. Irving has stood alone. It would be unjust and ungenerous to say so; it would be unfair to others, and I am sure Mr. Irving would reject such a compliment; and, if I know anything of him, he would resent it. But, at all events, he has followed the best traditions; he has helped so far as he can his contemporaries; he has made the matter easier for those who come after him; for never must we forget that the profession of an actor is surrounded, as many other professions are, with difficulties, dangers, and temptations peculiar to itself. It is true that in the case of the actor the difficulties and the temptations are more open and obvious than in many professions, but I do not know that they are for that reason any the more easy to resist

and overcome, because they are founded on the strongest and commonest passions of mankind. I do not here speak of the commoner, grosser, fouler forms of vice, which, when I was a young man, were the disgrace and the dishonour of the playhouses of London—of playhouses in which the players themselves were oftentimes men and women of perfectly good lives and absolutely unspotted characters. Reformation in this direction was begun by a man whom I am proud to be allowed to think of as my friend—Mr. Macready. It was carried on with some self-sacrifice, but with great and successful results. Every respectable manager, I believe, since his time has followed the example of Mr. Macready, and, of course, I need not say that Mr. Irving has done so also. But I mean something more than this; I mean that the whole tone and atmosphere of the theatre, wherever Mr. Irving's influence has predominated, has been uniformly high and pure—that the pieces which he has acted, and the way he has acted them, have always been such that no husband need hesitate to take his wife, and no mother need fear to take her daughter to a theatre where Mr. Irving's was the ruling spirit. He has, I believe, recognised that in this matter there lies upon him,

and upon all men in his position, a grave responsibility. He has felt, possibly unconsciously, that the heroic signal of Lord Nelson ought not to be confined in its application simply to men at arms —that 'England expects every man to do his duty;' and nobly he has done that duty."

It used to be asserted by people who knew no better, that Mr. Irving's object was to be surrounded by indifferent performers in order that public attention might be concentrated on himself. The vices of what is called the "star" system are still too common on the stage, but they have always been wholly foreign to Mr. Irving's ideal of dramatic propriety. Some day an instructive story may be told of his efforts to obtain competent coadjutors, and of the reasons why he was not always successful in procuring the services of artists who enjoyed a high reputation. But any one who has watched the course of his management of the Lyceum closely and dispassionately must have seen how strenuous has been the endeavour to strengthen his supports. The representation of "Much Ado About Nothing" sufficiently confutes the theory that everything is sacrificed to preserve the prominence of the leading actor. An American artist who has had much

experience of theatres, and who saw Mr. Irving in this comedy for the first time, said he was disappointed, not because the acting was not good, but because he had expected to find everything subordinated to Mr. Irving, and found instead, that Mr. Irving was simply a personage in a great play, who had no manner of deference paid to him by the rest of the company, beyond what was due to the character he represented. This *näive* astonishment was one of the best compliments Mr. Irving has ever received; and the fact to which it bears witness was admirably stated by Lord Coleridge in commenting on "the generosity and unselfishness of Mr. Irving's career." "He has shown that generosity, not only in the parts which he has played, but in the parts which he has not played. He has shown that he does not care to be always the central figure of a surrounding group, in which every one was to be subordinated to the central actor, and in which every actor was to be considered as a foil to the leading part. He has been superior to the selfishness which now and again has interfered with the greatness of some of our best actors, and he has had his reward. He has collected around him a set of men who, I believe, are proud of acting with him—

men whose feeling towards him has added not a little to the brilliant success which his management has achieved; men who feel that they act not only under the manager, but under the friend; men who are proud to be his companions, and many of whom have come here to-night to show by their presence that they are so. I confess that, being a professional man myself, I honour and like his feeling and his wisdom. What to a professional man can compensate for the good feeling, the affection, and the regard of those among whom his life is passed? Surely such feelings are worth more, far more, than the little added triumph which an undeviating self-assertion may sometimes secure. My lords and gentlemen, I believe it is because we think that these high aims have been pursued by Mr. Irving, and because we respect and admire his character in so pursuing them—it is for this reason that this unexampled gathering has assembled here to-night."

Equally felicitous was Lord Coleridge's analysis of the qualities which have made Mr. Irving so great an artist, and which prompted the honours which have been lavished upon him. "Now, it is plain that no man could come to such a meeting as this, and could bring together such an assembly

of men as I see before me, unless he had great and remarkable qualities as an artist. This alone would not be sufficient, because there has been many and many a great artist who has never had such a recognition as this. But it is undoubtedly true that any one, to have produced the weight and general effect upon the cultivated mind that Mr. Irving has produced, must be an accomplished and thorough artist. It does not become me now —I have not the skill or power—to analyse critically Mr. Irving's genius, to weigh it in the balance of opinion, or to say that in this or in that it is deficient. To me it is sufficient to be sure that he has the extraordinary and unusual power of conveying the conception of the part which he acts, that he has the power of expressing to me and to others and making us comprehend what is in his own mind, and what is his own distinct intellectual conviction. It does not become me, where so much is good, and where so much is more than good, is excellent—it does not become me, being a mere amateur, a mere occasional, and very occasional playgoer, to pick out for praise this particular thing or that particular thing; but if I may be permitted to say in what, in my judgment, the genius of Mr. Irving has cul-

minated, I should say for myself that it would be seen in 'Hamlet,' and in the intense—I had almost said the extreme—malignity of the villain in the 'Lyons Mail.' I do not pretend to be a critic, but I can only say that I have found great delight in Mr. Irving, and great delight in the versatility of Mr. Irving's powers. He seems to me to be a thorough artist. He not only plays good tragedy, but he plays good comedy and farce. I repeat that I cannot pretend to criticise; I am bound simply to admire, and I say that in these things Mr. Irving has shown himself to be a thorough and an accomplished artist. In conclusion, let me say that as America sent Booth to us, so we send Irving to America; and as England and Irving received Booth with open arms, so I am convinced that that great and generous country will receive our first-rate and admirable actor. At all events, we tell America that we send her of our best on this her birthday as a birthday present; and that we send her a man to whom I may fitly and properly adapt the words of a great Roman orator in a famous oration—'Summus artifex et, mehercule, semper partium in republicâ tanquam in scena optimarum,' which I will venture to roughly translate, that 'he is a consummate artist, cap-

able of the best parts both on the stage and off it.'"

In simple and dignified language Mr. Irving disclaimed the compliment to himself. "I regard it as a tribute to the art which I am proud to serve; and that pride will, I am sure, be shared by the profession to which you have assembled to do honour. The time has long gone by when there was any need to apologise for the actor's calling. The world can no more exist without the drama than it can without its sister art of music. The stage gives the readiest response to the demand of human nature, to be transported out of itself into the realms of the ideal. Not that all our ideals on the stage are realised; none but the artist truly knows how immeasurably he may fall short of his aim or his conception. But to have an ideal in art, and to strive through one's life to embody it, may be a passion to the actor as it may be to the poet."

In a warm welcome from the American people Mr. Irving expressed a manly confidence. "It is often an ambition with English actors to gain the good-will of the English-speaking race, a good-will which is right heartily reciprocated towards our American fellow-workers, when they gratify us

by sojourning here. Your God-speed would alone assure me a hearty welcome in any land; but I am not going among strangers—I am going among friends; and when I, for the first time, touch American ground I shall receive many a grip of the hand from men whose friendship I am proud to possess. Concerning our expedition, the American people will no doubt exercise an independent judgment—an old prejudice of theirs, and a habit of long standing with them, as your lordship has reminded us, by the fact that to-day is the Fourth of July, an anniversary rapidly becoming an English institution. Your lordship is doubtless aware, as to-night has so happily proved, that the stage has reckoned among its stanchest supporters many great and distinguished lawyers. There are many lawyers I am told in America, and as I am sure that they all deserve to be judges, I am in hopes that they will materially help us to gain a favourable verdict from the American people. I have given but poor expression to my sense of the honour you have conferred upon me, and upon the comrades associated with me in this our enterprise — an enterprise which I hope will favourably show the method and discipline of a company of English actors; on their behalf I

thank you, and I also thank you on behalf of the lady who has so adorned the Lyceum stage, and to whose rare gifts your lordship has paid so just and gracious a tribute. The climax of the favour extended to me by my countrymen has been reached to-night. You have set upon me a burden of responsibility which I gladly and proudly bear. To me the memory of to-night will be a sacred thing—a memory which will, throughout my life, be ever treasured—a memory which will stimulate me to further endeavour, and encourage me to loftier aims."

To these quotations may be added one more, which, though it is not taken from any of the speeches on this memorable evening, has a direct affinity with the occasion. It is a quotation from the speech of Mr. Macready at the banquet given to him on his retirement from the stage in 1851. "With the reflection, and under the conviction, that our drama, the noblest in the world, can never lose its place from our stage while the English language lasts, I will venture to express one parting hope that the rising actors may keep the loftiest look, may hold the most elevated views of the duties of their calling. I would hope that they will strive to elevate their art, and also to

raise themselves above the level of the player's easy life to public regard and distinction by a faithful ministry to the genius of our incomparable Shakespeare. To effect this creditable purpose they must bring resolute energy and unfaltering labour to their work; they must be content 'to spurn delights and live laborious days;' they must remember that whatever is excellent in art must spring from labour and endurance.

> 'Deep the oak
> Must sink in stubborn earth its roots obscure,
> That hopes to lift its branches to the sky.'

This, I can assure you, was the doctrine of our own Siddons, and of the great Talma, and this is the faith I have ever held as one of the humblest of their disciples." And this, too, is the faith and doctrine, the earnest, patient, and unflagging practice of which have made Henry Irving the worthy successor of William Charles Macready.

But the public acclamation of Mr. Irving was very far from being exhausted when the last speech at the banquet had been made, and the last cheer had been given. The voice of the great play-going community which does not go to banquets had still to be heard. The last night of a Lyceum

season is always a great occasion. Mr. Irving's admirers throng the theatre, not so much for the sake of the performance as to hear the speech in which the manager talks confidentially about his plans for the future, and which everybody present feels to be addressed as directly to himself as if Mr. Irving had favoured him with a private interview. A stranger who strolled into the Lyceum for the first time on an occasion of this kind could not fail to be struck by the personal affection with which the actor is regarded by the entire audience. He does not know them all. The vast majority have never exchanged a word with him in private life. His personal friends are there, but their attachment, intense as it is, is but a small part of the devotion represented by the immense assembly, which, in its turn, is but a fraction of the multitude who would flock into the theatre if it could be indefinitely expanded. But all the demonstrations on all the "last nights" at the Lyceum were completely eclipsed by the scene on July 28, 1883. There was to be no ordinary parting between Mr. Irving and his friends. He was not simply going to leave them for two or three months, while he made a little tour in the provinces; they were to

lose him for nearly a whole year. An ocean would roll between them and their idol. He was going forth to appeal to a new tribunal in a distant land. And the thought of this separation and this enterprise caused such love, pride, and sympathy to surge up like a great sob from the people's heart, that it was no wonder that the actor was almost overwhelmed by this unexampled tribute. Of the performance of "Eugene Aram" and "The Belle's Stratagem" that night little need be said. As the conscience-stricken murderer and the gay man of fashion, the actor showed two extremes of his art; but the people were less intent upon the play than upon the reality which was to follow. And when Mr. Irving stepped at last before the curtain, and tried in a broken voice to say farewell, and when the band played "Auld Lang Syne," and the entire company of the theatre stood upon the stage, while women wept, and men madly cheered, and one and all appeared to be waving all the pocket handkerchiefs they possessed; and when all this continued till it seemed as if the people would be satisfied only when they had gasped "Good-bye" with their last breath, the coldest heart and the most cynical mind might have confessed that the man who had

won so much affection and esteem must have made the stage a mighty power for good.

But it was not to London alone that Mr. Irving had to bid farewell. Before he sailed for America he played in Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Liverpool. Probably no actor has ever passed through such a fever of enthusiasm. Always a favourite in Scotland, Mr. Irving was received this time with a rapturous excitement which surpassed all previous welcomes. The twelve nights' engagement at Glasgow yielded nearly £4,500. On the last night Mr. Irving was forced to address the audience before the end of the play. After the fourth act of "The Merchant of Venice" he was re-called four times, and the storms of applause would not be stilled till Shylock had announced that "when the Christians had settled their little differences at Belmont," he would reappear to return his thanks. When the curtain finally fell, Mr. Irving made one of the happiest of his innumerable speeches, laying humorous stress upon the inconvenience of this unappeasable desire to hear him speak in his own proper person. "Since I stated so formally a few minutes ago that I would address you I am sure that Richard the Third before the battle of Bosworth Field hadn't more

unquiet thoughts than I have had. I am in the position of the gentleman in the American story who had prepared a great address to deliver at a public meeting. When he arrived at the railway station, much to his surprise he was met by a brass band and the committee of the meeting. Well, he did not know what to say to them; he could think of nothing but a poetical quotation. It had nothing to do with the brass band, or the committee, or the railway station, or anything else, but he fired off this quotation, much to the bewilderment of everybody. I am a little in that position, for I really have had so many speeches to make, and I have so many in the future to get through, that I am almost afraid I shall say something to you that I have intended for another occasion."

This was not Mr. Irving's only rhetorical effort in Glasgow, for, at a banquet given to him by the Pen and Pencil Club of that city, he made a speech which contained a striking illustration of the decline of intolerant rancour against the stage. "The playgoers of Glasgow and Edinburgh were my earliest friends—the first to stimulate my ambition by their generous encouragement, and the first, when success came, to crown it with

inspiriting and ungrudging recognition. There is some fitness, I believe, in my association with your club, for although I handle neither pen nor pencil with anything like dexterity, I have certainly given exercise to both pretty often, and not always with the most gratifying results, as I am occasionally reminded in looking in at the shop windows; but in art we are brothers, and if Sock and Buskin had no help from Pen and Pencil, Sock and Buskin would make considerably less impression on the public mind. The presence of the Lord Provost irresistibly recalls a time when such an honour as this banquet to an actor would have been as abnormal in Scotland as an earthquake. You, my Lord Provost, had you lived in those times, would doubtless have thought it your painful duty to put as many actors as you could conveniently find into durance vile. I am sure you would have performed that office with a grace and an urbanity which would have endeared you to your victims; but, on the whole, I am glad that you and I were not contemporaries in that age. The decline of prejudice against stage plays is nowhere more marked than in Scotland—a prejudice which withers with the increase of education and the advance of enlightened tolerance. I was amused

the other day to receive, among the many requests I have had for some sort of occupation connected with our American tour, an application from a clergyman who was desirous of accompanying us upon our expedition as honorary chaplain. His claims were certainly considerable, for he possessed a cheerful disposition, affable manners, and thoroughly broad views—an excellent diploma, which almost made me regret that so agreeable a companion would not be amongst us."

At Edinburgh Mr. Irving opened a new theatre, named after the Lyceum :

> "From out whose shrine we steal Promethean fire,
> The ancient Thespis with new life t'inspire,"

as a local bard expressed it. The Edinburgh Pens and Pencils, not to be outdone by their Glasgow brethren, also entertained the actor at a banquet, and extracted from him a lament that he was not a Scotchman, and an exposition of his views respecting scenic decorations. "I look upon this gathering to-night as a recognition that you acknowledge the stage as an institution of intellectual delight—a place of recreation for intelligent people. I am proud of being an actor, and I am proud of my art. It is an art which never dies — whose end and aim is to hold the mirror up to nature, to

give flesh and blood to the poet's conception, and to lay bare to an audience the heart and soul of the character which the actor may attempt to portray. It has been the habit of people to talk of Shakespearian interpretations as classic. We hear of classic this and classic that; and if classic is to be refined, and pure, and thoughtful, and natural, then let us be classic by all means; but if in the interpretation of Shakespeare to be classic is to be anything but natural, then the classic is to my thinking a most dangerous rock to strike upon; and as I would be natural in the representation of character, so I would be truthful in the mounting of plays. My object in this is to do all in my power to heighten, and not distract, the imagination—to produce a play in harmony with the poet's ideas, and to give all the picturesque effect that the poet's text will justify. Now, this they have been striving to do since Shakespeare's day. Under Shakespeare's own management every conceivable property was forced into requisition for that purpose; and how he himself lamented their shortcomings he tells us—

> 'O for pity! We shall much disgrace
> With four or five most vile and ragged foils,
> Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous,
> The name of Agincourt.'

Betterton, when reproached with the old cry that he was introducing scenery to the detriment of the acting, replies, 'No, I am not; the scenery which I put before you is better than the tapestry you have been accustomed to, where your senses have been distracted by the hideous figures worked upon it.' What Garrick did we know, and how he was reproached we know also. In fact, from the beginning they were all striving to do what we, with our superior resources, are able in some degree to effect. Nothing is more objectionable in scenic decoration than certain sorts of realism; but harmony of colour and grace of outline are honest methods as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine. That is the aim and purpose of the method I try to realise, and I strive to be thorough in it, have I to show the hovel of Lear or the palace of Cleopatra. I have told you so often—and you must be tired of hearing it—that Edinburgh was my *alma mater;* and when I think of my day-dreams here, some of which have not been wholly unrealised; and when I recall the friendships I formed here, some of which have never faltered, and of the friends whom I have lost only through the too swift embrace of the fell serpent death—you will know how dear to

me is your noble city. It is impossible to reply to all the kind things which have been said of me to-night. If I attempted to do so I should only lapse into a melancholy study of my own infirmities; but in all places and upon all occasions I shall ever be sensible of my lasting debt to the friends who have so cordially welcomed me."

At Liverpool Mr. Irving reached the last stage of his triumphal progress. Here exciting incidents trod closely on one another's heels. On the last night of his engagement at the Alexandra Theatre, Saturday, October 6th, Mr. Irving made the inevitable speech. He said he had many memories of Liverpool. "One of them is of a time, eighteen years ago, when I stood upon the steps of the Prince of Wales's Theatre without an engagement, and wondered what on earth I should do next." After expressing his sense of the extraordinary goodwill which had been shown by the British public to Miss Terry and himself, Mr. Irving remarked appropriately enough, "Like Sir Peter Teazle we leave our characters behind us, but we are more confident than Sir Peter that they will be well taken care of."

During his stay in Liverpool Mr. Irving received a compliment very similar to that paid him at

Glasgow and Edinburgh. The Liverpool Art Club burst into festivity in his honour, and gave Mr. Irving an opportunity of showing that overweening confidence is not an attribute of a great artist. "I can but think," he said, "that a certain fellow-feeling has made you wondrous kind to-night, and that you all know well that great patience and labour are needed for the attainment of a permanent position in the practice of any art. The maxim is well worn that 'Art is long and life is short,' and there is no art, believe me, which is longer than the actor's, and there is no life which can adequately fill up the measure of its requirements. A friend of mine was once a dear friend of William Charles Macready, and was with him at his final performance of 'Hamlet.' The play was over, the curtain had fallen, and the great actor was sadly thinking that for the last time he had acted his much-loved part. And, almost unconsciously—as he was taking off his velvet mantle and laying it aside—he muttered Horatio's words, 'Good night, sweet Prince,' and then, turning to his friend, 'Ah,' said he, 'I am just beginning to realise the sweetness, the tenderness, the gentleness, of this dear Hamlet.' We can do no

greater injustice to a true artist than to suppose that he lingers fondly upon what he has done. He is ever thinking of what remains undone; ever striving towards an ideal it may never be possible to realise. Still we have the hope that art is progressive, and that what cannot be achieved by us may be accomplished by actors of some other time. Certainly nowadays we cannot complain of neglect. Our public and private lives, our morals and our money, our whims and caprices, are descanted upon with the apparent earnestness of truth and seeming sincerity of conviction. In fact, many people think there is a great deal too much fuss made about us, and perhaps I for one am not inclined to disagree with them; but it is difficult not to find some lively controversy going on concerning the influence of the stage, or the merits or demerits of particular players; and there is no danger, I think, of any stagnating unanimity in these matters. Why, even actors are beginning to give public expression to their estimate of the capacity of their fellow-workers, and, regrettable as this may be, one cannot close one's eyes to the fact that concerning old methods and new methods a battle is waging in every field of art.

Perhaps I am not altogether an unbiassed witness of the fray, for the cudgels sometimes play around my own devoted head with a proximity which is quite startling. But all this is a tribute to the growing influence of the stage, and we should be grateful if we are at all instrumental in increasing the power which the drama should exercise over thinking people."

Time did not permit Mr. Irving to meet Mr. Gladstone's wishes by visiting Hawarden, but he bade farewell to the Prime Minister at Knowsley on October 9th, when taking leave of the Earl and Countess of Derby. On the following day the great majority of the Lyceum company, numbering more than forty members, under the direction of Mr. Bram Stoker, sailed for New York, whither the heavy baggage of the expedition in the shape of scenery and properties had preceded them; and on October 11th, Mr. Irving and Miss Terry, accompanied by Mr. Henry Loveday, received the final offerings of friendship on board the White Star steamer *Britannic*. This is not quite accurate, for as soon as the mayor and corporation of Cork learned that the *Britannic* would be detained some hours at Queenstown, they resolved to seize the opportunity of present-

ing Mr. Irving with positively the last token of national regard, and of listening to his last speech, before he crossed the Atlantic. But to those who saw the *Britannic* under weigh in the Mersey it seemed as if they had touched the climax of the enthusiastic goodwill which was sending Mr. Irving to America with such earnest hope of success; and this feeling was all the more natural, perhaps, because of a little ceremony in the morning. A deputation of the directors and trustees of the Royal General Theatrical Fund came from London to invite Mr. Irving to preside for the third time at the annual dinner of the fund in 1884. Mr. Thomas Swinburne, the treasurer of the fund, made an admirable little speech, in which he thanked Mr. Irving for his devotion to the good cause which the fund represents, and assured him of such a welcome on his return from America as no actor had ever received before. Mr. Irving suggested that what he had done for the fund might be due to an uneasy conscience, for though he was a subscriber very early in his career, he remembered that his subscription lapsed when his funds got low. But he thought the fund should commend itself with peculiar force to all actors, for it proved the common ground on which

they could meet and work together for the general good of the profession.

The scene of parting must have reminded Miss Terry of her triumphs in the theatre, for immense baskets of flowers appeared suddenly; and fairly caught, she was obliged to yield to a prevailing passion for her autograph. There was no desk and there was no ink, so amidst much merriment Miss Terry made the donors of the flowers exceedingly happy by using them as impromptu desks while she pencilled her name. After this the warning bell of the tender compelled the crowd to move reluctantly off the steamer, and stand with upturned faces taking a last, long look at Mr. Irving and Miss Terry as they stood together and smiled adieu. Then, as the tender drew away, cheer after cheer broke forth, and Miss Terry kissed her hands, and Mr. Irving, evidently much moved, bared his head and looked down with a wistful gaze which many who saw it will long remember. And so the great actor and actress began their memorable voyage.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE AMERICAN TOUR, 1883–84.

MR. IRVING and Miss Terry arrived in New York on October 21, 1883. They were welcomed in the bay by a large number of friends, and of representatives of the Press who favoured their readers next day with copious descriptions of the distinguished visitors. Nothing is sacred to an American reporter; but Mr. Irving had early reason to be gratified by the singular moderation of the scribes who kindly took charge of his personal appearance. It was no common ordeal. The actor must have felt that he was surveyed from his hat to his boots by eyes which are not accustomed to allow the minutest detail to escape them. He had been described often enough in England, but English readers are con-

tent with a slight sketch of a remarkable exterior, whereas the American does not feel that he knows a man till he has an accurate calculation of the number of his buttons. But Mr. Irving came out of this trial very successfully. Probably he did not mind the allusions to his "careless" attire, or the statement that his hat was "purplish," and "slouched a trifle on the side." Nor was there anything irritating in this: "Long grey hair, thrown carelessly back behind the ears, clean-shaven features remarkable for their delicate refinement, united with the suggestion of virile force, and a pair of eye-glasses perched on the rather aquiline nose, combined to remove any lingering doubt that it was Henry Irving, the greatest living English actor." Perhaps he was a little troubled to learn that "a glimmer of a smile intensified the peculiar dimple on the lower lip;" for the eye which detected a dimple that had passed a good many years in England without becoming famous might magnify other and less pleasing peculiarities. But the only unkind thing said of Mr. Irving on his arrival was that he resembled Mr. Oscar Wilde. "The figure was muscular, as the æsthete's was, and the face was long, and a trifle like his; but there was far

more strength in it, and it was more refined and manly." Thus there was a dash of bitterness in Mr. Irving's first American cup, though the writer who commended the chalice to his lips was not without a desire to sweeten the draught.

As for Miss Terry, she could not have been much offended to read that "her dress consisted of a dark, greenish-brown cloth wrap, lined inside with a peculiar shade of red; the inner dress, girt at the waist with a red, loosely folded sash, seemed a reminiscence of some eighteenth century portrait, while the delicate complexion caught a rosy reflection from the loose flame-coloured red scarf tied in a bow at the neck." The American reporter, like George Washington, cannot tell a lie; so Miss Terry's figure was described as "spare," and even "thin;" but there was the compensatory admission that it was "lithe, sinuous, and handsome in its proportions." Many writers, even of great powers of expression, feel constrained sometimes to speak of a lady's face with conventional vagueness; but the American reporter knows his duty and performs it without flinching. Miss Terry's face, he declared, is "not by ordinary canons beautiful, but it is, nevertheless, one to be remembered, and

seems to have been modelled on that of some pre-Raphaelitish saint—an effect heightened by the aureole of soft golden hair escaping from under the plain brown straw and brown velvet hat." Rich and rare was the silver pencil-case she wore, "hanging from a delicate silver chain round the neck;" and the fact that this was her "only ornament" was doubtless intended by the austere reporter as a rebuke to ladies who burden themselves with multitudinous gems.

Before she reflected on the exacting character of the interviewer's calling, Miss Terry may have been rather startled by the accuracy with which her lightest remarks were set down and published. Mr. Irving seemed somewhat better prepared for this product of Western civilization. He talked to the interviewers with the greatest frankness, even about his Romeo, gave them a dissertation on Shakespeare, stage-management, scenery, his own career, and other matters with which English readers are pretty familiar; but withal, he managed to convey to the interviewing mind that he was telling what he chose to tell, and no more, and that every attempt to extract information beyond that limit would not succeed. This wholesome understanding was of great service

throughout the tour; and there was no trouble with any of the interviewers except a gentleman at Baltimore, who wrote that Mr. Irving had cast injurious reflections on the artistic education of Americans—a statement which compelled the actor to make forcible use of the retort direct.

To some people in England it was distressing to find that the Americans regarded Mr. Irving from the first as a man with a great reputation, which it was reasonable to suppose that he would justify by his acting. The extraordinary sale of tickets for his first performances, the excitement about his arrival in New York, and, above all, the banquet given to him by the members of the Lotus Club two days before his appearance at the Star Theatre, were the grounds for the amiable assertion that American opinion was a mere slavish echo of the applause which the actor had won in this country. But the Americans were naturally anxious to see Mr. Irving; they extended to him the hospitable recognition due to the most distinguished actor of his nation; they showed that no patriotic prejudice in favour of their own actors prevented them from taking an intelligent interest in the work of an English artist; they flocked to the theatre to see him act; and they expressed

their judgment with the freedom and freshness which mark their national individuality.

The play chosen for Mr. Irving's *début* in New York was "The Bells." Many of his friends would have been glad had he struck higher at the outset; but, as he explained, he wished to present as nearly as possible in their order the series of plays in which he had originally won his fame at the Lyceum. On Monday, October 29th, Mr. Irving faced his new critics for the first time. His success was never in doubt for a moment. He had not been five minutes on the stage before the weird fascination with which he invests the haunted burgomaster took full possession of his audience. They had expected something extraordinary, and they were not disappointed. The famous dream-scene, which is the climax of the play, was watched with painful interest; and when the curtain fell, the actor received the most convincing demonstration of his triumph.

There is probably no part in his repertory in which Mr. Irving's personal peculiarities are so marked as in Mathias. They did not escape the attention of his New York critics. It was very soon manifest, indeed, that there was not the slightest intention to overlook faults and lavish

indiscriminate praise. But his immediate success with an audience, few of whom had ever seen him before, showed that his great qualities completely overshadowed whatever was defective in his manner. This fact was put with concise emphasis by the *New York Herald:* "Of Mr. Irving's position in the dramatic art, it would be impossible to judge from the admirable work in this play. It proved him to be an actor of rare histrionic gifts and subtle powers in the weird and imaginative school to which this drama belongs; but of course it failed to touch the intellectual limits which must be reached by an actor who aspires to the foremost rank on the stage. Mr. Irving's powers of facial expression are simply marvellous. Were he not to utter a line of the play his audience could see reflected on his mobile features every thought as it passed across his mind. No words that he said last night could have intensified the story of agony that was told upon his face in the earlier scenes, nor could words have made known more effectively than did his awful look in the Court scene the horror of the man who is alone with his conscience. His gestures are not easy or graceful, nor does he tread the stage in any but a distractingly awkward way;

but the man is so picturesque and imposing, his face is so strangely fascinating, his intellectual force and his command of his own and the audience's feelings is so absolute, that it is impossible to remember his mannerisms in the interest and admiration his better qualities excite, and which, despite these drawbacks, are irresistibly powerful. Mr. Irving has been accused of mumbling his words and giving extraordinary and almost grotesque inflection to his sentences. This is all true, but, quarrel as we will with him for one moment on this score, we forgive and forget it directly under the magnetism of what he accomplishes next through the medium of his genius. His success last night as Mathias was of that emphatic kind which bears the stamp of unqualified popular approval, and cannot be questioned."

Mr. William Winter, the accomplished critic of the *Tribune*, expressed himself very much in the same strain. Mr. Irving, he said, in spite of defects, "speaks to the soul and the imagination." No one who took the trouble to watch the audience that night at the Star Theatre could question this. But, as usual, there were scribes who evolved from their inner con-

sciousness a totally different idea of the general feeling. One of them undertook to say that Mr. Irving was hard, cold, formal, and mechanical; that his face—his face!—was devoid of expression, and that he was incapable of passion, inspiration, and enthusiasm. This, as a personal opinion, was of no particular moment; but critics of this class are not content with a personal opinion; they must needs make everybody share it. So we were informed that their judgment on Mr. Irving was the dispassionate opinion of the average playgoer. After this, the only course open to the average playgoer was to take no further notice of an actor who had failed to move him in the smallest degree; but, strange to say, he has been at the pains to make Mr. Irving's tour in America the greatest success in the theatrical annals of that country.

It was not surprising that the actor should be deeply gratified by so remarkable a reception. Mr. Irving was as enthusiastic in praise of his audience as they were in praise of him. After the performance, the inevitable interviewer was at his elbow like a familiar who would not be denied. Had Mr. Irving been able and disposed to snap his pertinacious questioner in two, as the friar in

Ingoldsby snapped the stick which persisted in bringing in beer, I have no doubt the pieces would have rushed at him with fresh vollies of queries. But the actor opened his heart, and who can blame him? He was victorious, and the cheers of the delighted throng still rang in his ears. "When first I stepped into view of the audience," he said, "and saw and heard the great reception it gave me, I was filled with emotion. I felt it was a great epoch in my life. The moment I looked over the footlights at the people, I knew we were friends. I knew they wanted to like me, expected something great, and would go away if I disappointed them, saying—'Well, we wanted to like him and can't.' Who could stand before such an audience on such an occasion and not be moved deeply?" Then Mr. Irving proceeded to show in what respects his American audience was superior to English audiences; and if the glow of his new satisfaction a little over-coloured some of his comparisons, who shall complain?

In "Charles I.," which was produced on Tuesday, October 30th, Miss Terry won a triumph which was but the prelude to many. Henrietta Maria is not her best part, but that simple pathos, in which she is unrivalled, made her at once

supreme over the hearts of her auditors. Of the Charles, Mr. Winter wrote: "Mr. Irving's acting was calmly vigorous with the weight of personal character, very various with the play of fine intellect, excellent for its even sustainment of Royal dignity, richly complex in its elaborate courtly manners, and fraught equally with sombre strangeness and tender feeling. The part admits of no wild outburst of morbid frenzy, and no fantastic treatment. Royal authority, moral elevation, and domestic tenderness are the chief elements to be expressed, and Mr. Irving, with all his ripe experience, could find no difficulty in expressing them. What most impressed his auditors was his extraordinary physical fitness for the accepted ideal of Charles, combined with a passionate earnestness and personal magnetism that enable him to create and sustain a perfect illusion. The performance is less striking than Mathias, less relative to imagination and passion, and therefore less indicative of the characteristic attributes of his genius, but undoubtedly it is one of the most rounded and complete of his intellectual work."

That is a fair summary, though not all the actor's admirers will allow that Mathias is more

striking than Charles; but, of course, in other quarters, Mr. Irving's claims to pathos were vigorously denied. One genius discovered a comfortable formula which made further analysis unnecessary. "Take away Mr. Irving's personality, and he is merely an awkward player." Take away his imagination, his insight, his emotional sympathy, his artistic conscientiousness, his facial expression and his vast experience, and you have nothing left but the mannerisms which you may denounce at large. An easy method of criticism, truly!

It may be admitted, however, that of the six plays which Mr. Irving presented during his first engagement in New York—"The Bells," "Charles I.," "Louis XI.," "The Merchant of Venice," "The Lyons Mail," and "The Belle's Stratagem"—Mr. Wills's tragedy was not the most attractive. In other cities, notably in Boston, it was far more successful than in the first week in New York; but though the receipts for that week, $15,772, were largely exceeded by the receipts of the three succeeding weeks in the same city, it was a ludicrous exaggeration to declare that the first week was a failure. Mr. Irving's detractors decided with characteristic haste that Mathias and Charles had

given them the full measure of his art. This was as wise as the assertion that he had lost the public favour. "Louis XI.," produced on the first night of the second week, threw its predecessors into the shade, and "The Merchant of Venice" which followed it was received with unbounded approbation.

Oddly enough, the miscalculations of the theatrical speculators in New York were taken by some people in England to mean that fortune had deserted Mr. Irving. The speculators were not much to be pitied. On the first night, Mr. Irving's treasury received $3,000, but the public paid more than $17,000. This enormous discrepancy was due to the enterprise of the gentry who bought tickets, and then hawked them in the streets at extortionate prices. The theatrical speculator is a pest happily unknown in this country; and that he should over-reach himself and take fright in that first week, selling his tickets for less than he gave for them, was a public benefit; but the Lyceum company must have been puzzled to learn that this gave rise in London to the philosophical reflection that they "were suffering from the very natural reaction which is going on in America against the previous floating of second-

hand English celebrities in that country by extravagant puffing."

The prevalence of this comical delusion was temporary. Mr. Irving must have smiled one of his most sardonic smiles when he heard that the hostility of one particular scribe in New York was supposed by some of his countrymen to have sealed his doom, and that the pompous statement of the *New York Times* that English opinion was "absolutely valueless in America in connection with the fine arts," was his American epitaph. That America has expressed an independent opinion of Mr. Irving can be shown without much difficulty; but independence is one thing, and grotesque detraction is another; and those who hoped that detraction would succeed on the other side of the Atlantic, though it had failed on this, have been signally disappointed.

As Louis XI. Mr. Irving won a triumph in America which almost silenced cavil. His most adverse critics were obliged to admit that it was a subtle and well-balanced performance, and showed a mastery of *technique*. But they made some shift to save their consistency by declaring that it had no soul. It was "monotonous, mechanical, and in a low key." It was not royal.

Louis was always the shambling hypocrite, never the king. As everybody else has always found the impersonation singularly varied, truthful, abounding in fine shades of expression, constantly suggestive of kingly supremacy and force of will, I do not quite see what "mechanical" may mean. The theory that an artist may be able to invent a great many illustrations of character, a great deal of what is called original "business," so successfully that he deludes most people into the belief that he is an essentially natural actor, and yet that all this is mechanism uninformed by the creative spirit, is too wonderful for mortal understanding. "Though malign and terrible," said Mr. Winter, "this Louis is nevertheless a king and a man. All along the lines of the part are excellent opportunities for the actor's incessant vitality and complex method—and especially for that picturesque mystery of manner through which his magnetism plays like the lightning in the cloud. The wan face, the dark and sunken eyes, the thick black eyebrows, the lowering, evanescent smile, the rapid yet stealthy movements—all these characteristics of King Louis Mr. Irving has caught to absolute perfection. His royalty is innate—precisely as it was in Charles I.—and

though this is a monarch who cares little for the mere shows of sovereignty, and can unbend and be familiar and even jocose, for a purpose, he remains a monarch, in every instant of his being, by virtue of that indefinable but undeniable majesty of character which makes certain men the superiors of their race."

In this judgment concurred a critical audience composed of a great throng of American actors. Some of them, veterans who had played with Macready, and were familiar with the traditions of the stage for more than a generation, broke into praises which would almost seem extravagant to the youngest and most ardent of Mr. Irving's admirers. There was no reason in the world why these men should extol the actor so highly if they did not speak from conviction. It does not need much knowledge of the theatrical profession to teach us that actors are not habitually enthusiastic about one another's merits. Mr. Irving was reminded, of course, that actors are bad judges of acting—that is to say, the expert knows little of that art in which he is himself proficient. If this be true, the pupils of a dramatic school ought to be taught by people who have never acted. I presume that those who hold this odd theory

believe that an actor, watching a performance, is too exclusively concerned with technicalities to be a judge of the highest histrionic merit; which is as much as to say that this merit is never present in an actor's mind, for if he is absorbed in technicalities off the stage, he will have no feeling for anything else when he is on it. "Actors applaud all the touches as you put them on," said Mr. Irving. "A general audience applaud the whole effect when made." But this does not disqualify the actor as a judge of the effect.

In America, however, as in England, Shakespeare established Mr. Irving's strongest claim to public regard. The representation of "The Merchant of Venice" was universally accepted as the best that the American playgoer could remember. He was accustomed to see the comedy maimed to suit the convenience of the "star" actor, who thought much more of himself than of the play. It was surprising to find a Shylock who did not claim that the fifth act should be cut off as well as the pound of Antonio's flesh. Some of Mr. Irving's critics thought that the Jew, in these novel conditions, was tame. "It is much below what we have been accustomed to," said one. No doubt this critic was accustomed to see Shy-

lock overshadow his contemporaries by the simple expedient of cutting out their lines. This is not dramatic art nowadays. Mr. Irving's American champions retorted that Shylock, in his hands, "becomes a natural and probable character, instead of a raving scene-chewer and impossible monstrosity." Mr. Winter, however, declared that he had seen Mr. Irving's Shylock "equalled, and sometimes surpassed." These more fortunate Shylocks must have been remarkable, indeed, if they deserved greater praise than Mr. Winter accorded to Mr. Irving. "His ideal is right, and his execution is full of subtle touches of art. His mental grasp of the part is perfect. His expression of austerity, of vindictive malignity, of the sullen resentment that broods over long-hoarded wrongs, was wonderfully fine—backed by great weight of intellect, and by fierce, hot-blooded inveterate purposes. His denotement of Shylock's domestic affections, which are equally profound, passionate, and pathetic, was clear and thrilling, especially in the frantic lamentation over his fugitive daughter, and the heart-broken words about Leah and the turquoise ring. The street scene he wrought up with a controlled intensity of passion that was painfully tragic.

He reached his summit and climax in, 'No tears but of my shedding,' and afterwards in the cold, determined, hellish cruelty of purpose that animates Shylock in the trial scene. His 'Come, prepare!' was spoken with superb effect. Such single achievements as these flash backward and irradiate a whole performance with the lustre of mind, just as the sheet lightning illuminates a summer evening sky. . . . His exit from the trial scene, in its grand Hebraic dignity, was an apex of perfect pathos. The great audience made the house resound here with its spontaneous plaudits, and would have recalled him; but, very wisely, he would not return." If there is any eulogy much higher than this, it has not come within my ken.

It was not to be expected that Mr. Irving's method of acting Shakespeare would be accepted all at once. To some his Shylock was "insignificant," and "amounted to nothing at all." These judges would probably have appreciated the acting of Edwin Forrest on a certain occasion, when in a stage fight he knocked down all the "supers," and was rewarded for this exhibition of brawn by enthusiastic applause. But before he ended his tour Mr. Irving had given a damaging blow to the whole scale of conventional ideals of dramatic art.

As for Miss Terry, her Portia was received with universal delight. Never were playgoers more completely captivated. To use a metaphor suggested to me by much reading of American newspapers, a perfect Mississippi of eloquence bore her radiant and triumphant from city to city. Mr. Irving's modest declaration at the St. James's Hall banquett, hat he would show the Americans "the method and discipline of a company of English artists," was fully justified. The general interpretation of "The Merchant of Venice" was admitted to be the most satisfying that New York had ever seen. "Looking around the delighted audience," said one enthusiast, "and recalling the playgoers of other days, it was impossible not to wish that Charles Lamb and Gulian C. Verplanck, lovers of the theatre and of Shakespeare, might have seen the harmonious and beautiful and satisfying representation—a poem seen with the eyes as well as heard with the ears —which they enjoyed who beheld Henry Irving's 'Merchant of Venice.'" The emotions of Gulian C. Verplanck would be deeply interesting, but Mr. Irving would probably prefer to hear Charles Lamb stutter his commendation of the actor who had so faithfully and reverently interpreted the spirit of the poet.

"The Lyons Mail" and "The Belle's Stratagem"—in which Miss Terry carried her audiences completely "away from all sobriety of judgment"—swelled the tide of success. As one ingenious commentator endeavoured to show that "The Merchant of Venice" saved Mr. Irving's first season in New York from financial failure, it may be useful to examine the bill for the last week, in which the receipts amounted to $22,321, or more than £700 a night. "The Bells" was played three times, "The Belle's Stratagem" twice, "Louis XI." twice (morning and evening performances), "The Lyons Mail" once, and "The Merchant of Venice" once. The receipts for the month produced the handsome total of £15,000. And if any further proof were needed of the extraordinary success of this engagement, it would be afforded by the proposal, unanimously supported, that a theatre should be built for Mr. Irving and his company in New York, and visited by him whenever he could be spared by his English public.

The great event of the engagement at Philadelphia was the production of "Hamlet." In this play Mr. Irving was brought into even more marked collision with the accepted ideal than in

"The Merchant of Venice." A Hamlet who did not make the traditional "points," and who suggested comparisons with the most eminent of living American actors, could not expect to find criticism a bed of roses. Still, it was curious that American opinion of Mr. Irving's "Hamlet" ran at first in very much the same channel with the English opinion of this impersonation in early days. The audience did not fully enter into the spirit of the first two acts, but were thoroughly aroused by the rest of the play. It cannot be said, however, that American audiences have failed to grasp the full significance of this Hamlet. It is a simple fact that at no time in England has Mr. Irving's acting in this tragedy excited such enthusiasm as in America. "He exhibited a breadth in his conception," remarked one critic, "and a capacity for deep passion and instantaneous action which, for the moment, to the eyes of the spectator, took the actor out of the domain of art into that of absolute realism." The general effect of the performance could not be better described in a single sentence. Of individual passages there was much praise in Philadelphia. The great scene with Ophelia, and the play scene, were specially commended. "In the play scene,"

said the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, "in which he seemed to fill the whole stage, in which a real frenzy appeared to fall upon his mind, he justified by the greatness of his acting almost all that has been said or could be said in praise of it. So grandly and impressively did he bring the scene to a close as to call down thunders of applause from an audience that he had thrilled and swayed by a power undeniably great. If that scene were ever before so nobly played, we were not there to see it done." Almost as ungrudging a tribute came from critics who, in writing of Mr. Irving's Louis XI., suggested that the actor appealed to the minds and not to the emotions of his auditors. Nothing is more instructive in American criticism of Mr. Irving than the vain efforts of some of his judges to maintain this particular reservation. One, for instance, described the death of Louis as "a picture so noble as to be remembered for ever." Yet this noble and immortal picture was produced by "little things," which showed, not genius, soul, or magnetism, but patient intelligence. This discrimination may fairly be described, *more Americano*, as "too thin." It is not the least of Mr. Irving's triumphs that he forces many of his critics to be enthusiastic

against their will; and their desperate attempts to recover what they think is a balance of judgment make their admissions all the more striking.

Of the general presentation of "Hamlet" there was but one opinion. Nobody remembered so perfect an Ophelia as Miss Terry; or so high a standard of excellence as that of the whole company. The vocabulary of encomium, exuberant as it is in America, was exhausted by the universal praises of the harmony and poetry of the stage pictures in the tragedy and in "The Merchant of Venice." "It is the completeness of them," said the *Philadelphia Evening Telegraph*, "the sense of fitness, which charms; they are resting as they are grateful to the senses, because they are true. The effort is not to dazzle, to impress, to electrify, but to show the thing itself, idealised to the proper point for stage effect—to make real through an atmosphere of poetry." Yet it was the living figures which, in the midst of these pictures, most deeply impressed the Philadelphia public. "Night after night hundreds of the same faces have been seen in the house, thus demonstrating that not Mr. Irving's fame nor their curiosity, but their interest and admiration, have drawn our citizens again and again to these performances. Whatever

else Mr. Irving may or may not be, he is unquestionably the most original actor that for very many years has set foot on our stage. In every character in which he has played, his originality has been by far his most apparent quality."

Nor did fastidious Boston check this remarkable influence. Here the great range of Mr. Irving's abilities was more keenly appreciated than in any other city, save Chicago. "Certain peculiarities of speech and bearing are chronic," said the *Transcript*, "but with every new character he assumes he really puts on a new individuality." To the Charles was paid this glowing tribute: "We have seen many grand and beautiful figures on the stage ere now—kings that were every inch a king; heroes that were most largely heroic, Nature's noblemen in many guises; but never before have we seen so complete and convincing an embodiment of that unique product of Nature and civilization which one calls truly the thorough gentleman; a character at once so unmistakeable in the impression it produces, and so elusive of analysis and definition, that it has been the opinion of many excellent judges that it cannot be *acted*, but can only be *lived*. In Mr. Irving's Charles I. one recognizes a man in whom, as Matthew Arnold

might say, the instinct for beauty transfuses and informs the instinct for conduct. With the historical exactness of the character we have, for the moment, nothing to do; we look upon it simply as a wonderfully well-rounded and incomparably well-realized dramatic conception."

But is this critic unconscious of those physical defects which cause some of Mr. Irving's censors to revise Vivien's injunction, and hold that we must blame him not at all, or all in all? Far from it. There is a considerable rift in the lute to which the *Transcript* sings the actor's praises, but it does not make the music mute. The critic condemns Mr. Irving's elocution in "Hamlet" in terms that would please his most uncompromising detractors. Idiosyncrasies of pose and gesture are treated with equal severity. "And yet criticise as many faults as we may, let the reason be persuaded to the full, the heart still remains unconvinced that it was bad acting. In face of the constantly powerful impression it made upon us, the faults were impotent to lessen our admiration; we were completely carried away, and for the moment were willing to accept them all. That this momentary silencing of the critical spirit was wholly due to the magnetic influence and charm of Mr. Irving's

personality we cannot think. It was undoubtedly due also to a certain unwonted quality in the very faults themselves which enabled them to bring their own pardon with them. Such is the innate dignity of the man, that we cannot find them ludicrous. And withal, he has this great and rare merit, that whatever he says does not sound like a speech committed to memory beforehand. He always seems to be talking, and not declaiming. He made Hamlet seem more of a convincing reality to us than ever before. He, somehow, made us feel as if all his own criticisable peculiarities were not so much his as Hamlet's, so thoroughly did he identify himself with the part. Never, since Rubinstein was here, have we seen a great artist make such patent faults go for nothing, present a grand and beautiful picture in which the blemishes were so easily forgetable. In a case like the present, descriptive analysis is idle; it can give no idea of the thing described. Let it suffice for us to say that Mr. Irving made us feel Hamlet more powerfully, more really, and with less effort on our own part, than any actor we can remember. The greatness, the intellectual and ethical force, above all the charm and loveableness of the man, were shown as we have never seen them before."

This is the kind of criticism on which true admirers of Mr. Irving may take their stand. It shows with conspicuous force how, when appealing to a fresh and dispassionate mind, the genius and art of the actor triumph over all faults and shortcomings.

In Boston Mr. Irving's acting in "The Lyons Mail" was highly and generally commended. There was no attempt to rival the achievement of the New York oracle, who declared that Lesurques was devoid of pathos, and that Dubosc in the last scene had no ferocity, but reminded him of Toodles. That judgment remains unique. Less ambitious critics were content to speak of "the beautifully tempered and graduated intensity of agony that first breaks upon Lesurques with the surprise of wounded pride, and finally crushes him with despair in the moments when he fails to convince his father and his family of his innocence." The contrasts between this impersonation and Dubosc, between Dubosc and Mathias, between Mathias and Charles I., between Charles I. and Hamlet, between Hamlet and Shylock, and between Shylock and Doricourt, did not seem to give much countenance in Boston to the theory that Mr. Irving is an actor of very limited aptitudes.

At Baltimore Mr. Irving's audiences were comparatively small, but they made up in enthusiasm for deficiency in numbers. From his critics Mr. Irving received the highest eulogy both for his Hamlet and Shylock. "Mr. Irving," said the *Day*, "assuredly is Hamlet. No more wondrous and satisfying performance has ever been seen here than that which he gave last night. It was marvellous in texture, delicate in treatment, and almost pre-Raphaelite in its attention to even the smallest detail. His psychologic analysis is rapid, subtle and complete in immediate expression. He takes the simplest line in the play, and by a passing touch invests it with a new beauty and meaning; he goes beyond the ordinary limits of stage expression; he makes the character blossom with beauty and gives to it deep moral meanings. The critical and satirical character of Hamlet's wit stands out in bold relief; the ungovernable fury to which he now and again yields himself is shown in all its intensity, not as a photographic picture, without any tints or background, but as something full of life and colour, moving and acting. In fact, the short limit of an ordinary newspaper article would fail to deal with all the new beauties which he brings out of the

play, with the delicate grace and fancy in which he clothes it, the sustained key on which the whole is pitched, the tenderness with which he dwells on his father's memory, the keen, incisive method in which he deals out irony and mimicry, the fierceness of his passionate invective, and the almost Rembrandt-like gloom with which he surrounds his shadowed heart."

Observe that it is always the thoroughness and completeness of Mr. Irving's embodiments of Shakespeare, the artistic whole, rather than this or that individual passage, which impresses his American admirers. No shade of the character is sacrificed or unduly subordinated in order to throw into relief some climax which may be theatrically effective, but is artistically false. Mr. Irving saw no reason to complain of his reception in Baltimore. "I had been told," he said, "that audiences in Boston and Baltimore were cold. I found them extremely warm. In fact, I had more applause from them than I have had in my own country. In Baltimore 'Hamlet' was received with grand enthusiasm."

After a successful week in Brooklyn, Mr. Irving repaired to Chicago, the capital of the West. If there were ever any misgivings as to his welcome

here, they were soon dissipated. The genial interviewer was at work when Mr. Irving was still one hundred and fifty miles from the city. Two columns and a half were easily filled with sketches of the actor's personal appearance—"his face, dress, hair, eye-glasses, and gestures off the stage," his conversation, and a vivid description of incidents of the journey, such as the way in which Miss Terry ate grapes. The interviewer was indignant at the idea that anybody should have compared Mr. Irving to Mr. Oscar Wilde. He was more like Theodore Tilton. This was scarcely a more exquisite song than the other, as the interviewer seemed to feel, for he proceeded with a vigorous depreciation of Mr. Tilton's features as compared with Mr. Irving's. The actor, as usual, was equal to the occasion. "Chicago," he said, speaking slowly, "is the wonder of the world. Whatever English people may think of other American cities, for Chicago they have nothing but admiration." When Philip Firmin broke into raptures about the great Duke's victory of Assaye, before his beloved Agnes Twysden, that discreet young lady, who had never heard the name before, said, "Marathon, Waterloo, Agincourt were grand, Philip—but Assaye! *Que*

voulez-vous?" So New York, Philadelphia, Boston are magnificent—but Chicago! *Que voulez-vous?*

Miss Terry was asked this interesting question: "What do you think of American gentlemen?" —but she managed to evade it.

It is difficult to describe the sensation created by Mr. Irving and Miss Terry, and the entire company in Chicago. It was an unqualified triumph from first to last. "Above all communities, the dwellers in this city stand for fair play," said the *Chicago Tribune;* and it did not take them long to discover that the English actor was one of the greatest players they had ever seen. His Louis, much as it had been applauded elsewhere, received its highest meed of approbation here. But the greatest commendation was accorded to the Shylock. "The noblest impersonation that Henry Irving has given us is his Shylock," said the *Tribune,* "because the actor portrays, not a mere commonplace individual, but the ideal Jew of the Middle Ages—the Jew who worshipped gold because it was the only shield between him and Christian persecution; the Jew whose heritage of hate came down to him through centuries of wrongs; the Jew whose pride

of race looked down from the towers of antiquity upon the upstart civilizations of the European world. . . . Irving's Shylock should receive the highest praise as being fully in accord with the advanced thought and culture of the present day." The new and old methods of playing Shylock were contrasted with much plainness. "Comparison is not criticism, but it may be used to advantage to show the difference between Irving's natural acting and the more melodramatic acting of the traditional school. The greatest line in 'The Merchant of Venice' is that where Shylock, stung to madness by his daughter's flight, suddenly learns that Antonio's ships have been lost at sea. Edwin Booth in playing Shylock is at the back of the stage when he hears these tidings. He flings his arms over his head, he comes staggering down in mighty strides to the footlights, and, sobbing in a delirium of revengeful joy, he flings himself into Tubal's arms, crying all the while, 'I thank God, I thank God—is it true? Is it true?' When Irving in the part of Shylock hears the same news he is standing beside his friend. There is an inarticulate moan as if speech had failed him; then the slow, awful words, 'I thank God,' thrilling in their terrible

solemnity; then a horrible suspicion and a hungry, gasping inquiry, 'Is it true? Is it true?' All is the work of a second. The description here given of the utterance of that single line is inadequate. But the contrast shows the difference between the old style of acting and the new. Booth's rendition brought tears of emotion to the eyes; Irving's utterance flashed across the brain in the splendour of its naturalness. Booth's cry embodied one over-mastering passion; Irving's the complex passions of the Hebrew's heart. The former was the more melodramatic; the latter was, beyond all question, the more artistic. In a word, Booth recited while Irving impersonated. Which of these schools of acting will be the school of the future? That question is one which the good taste of the English-speaking world has already answered."

It is noteworthy that this writer, when witnessing "The Lyons Mail" for the first time, thought Mr. Irving cold and lacking in emotional exaltation; but on the second night he was deeply moved by the "splendid pathos" of the great scene between Lesurques and his father. Admitting that he had witnessed the play on the former occasion with a strong prejudice against that class

of drama, the critic remarks, "This probably indicates that the effect of an actor's work often depends upon predisposing conditions in the mind of a spectator"—a theory which, together with this particular application, may be profitably pondered by many.

Chicago was the first of the cities to which Mr. Irving paid a return visit after engagements at St. Louis, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and Columbus. In the third week at Chicago, "Hamlet" and "Much Ado About Nothing" were produced —the latter play for the first time during the tour —eclipsing all that had gone before. All the loving labour which Mr. Irving has devoted to the interpretation of Hamlet was appreciated to the full. "The performance was the culminating triumph of the brilliant series of plays brought out by Mr. Irving in this city. The enthusiasm of the vast audience at times broke into cheers. It was expected that Henry Irving would give a superb impersonation of Hamlet. The actor's keen and penetrating intelligence, his sensibility, so true and delicate, though never superabundant, and, above all, his poetic temperament, which flings a halo of charm over every work which he interprets —these high qualifications fitted him to essay that

character, so subtle that it is almost an ideal which men look upon without hope of realization. The interpretation given last night was the most subtle, the most harmonious, and the most highly poetic that the present generation can hope to see upon the stage. Mr. Irving gave the character the rare and beautiful touch of high-bred courtesy. At no moment did Hamlet cease to be the Prince and the gentleman. In the play scene the Prince throws himself at Ophelia's feet, flings his jibes right and left, and the tension of his nerves is seen in the tightly drawn features, in the fiercely suspicious eye, in the twistings of the body. For one instant, when he sees Ophelia in tears, he presses his face against the floor, lying at full length, giving vent to one heart-throb of grief. The next moment he is all attention, more highly strung to to his purpose than before, more feverishly impatient for the climax. It comes with thrilling swiftness, and Hamlet's frenzy bears it upward on soaring wings of passion. His face is livid with the demoniac madness of satisfied suspicion, of revenge, of hate; he drags himself from Ophelia's feet, and writhing toward the king in a triumph of delirium, confronts the murderer of his father. He staggers to his feet as king and courtiers

scatter in horrified amazement; he grasps the throne convulsively and sinks down, still laughing and gasping in mad and reckless joy. Then comes the reaction. This scene is one of magnificent emotional power and of matchless dramatic conception."

This dithyrambic strain was almost universal. It was repeated at a higher pitch, if possible, in the welcome to "Much Ado About Nothing."

"The Benedick was a true, poetic, and lofty interpretation; it was the light sketch of the poet richly coloured and completed; it was the full-blown blossom of pure, romantic comedy. Ellen Terry gave to the performance its crowning grace, and sprightliness and charm. It is the province of the highest genius to reveal his master-strokes of nature in all their outgushing spontaneity. This Ellen Terry does as no woman has done before her. It is Ellen Terry's highest merit that she enters into the very heart of Shakespeare's meaning, and makes the most simple passages flash out with irresistible and wonderfully dazzling mirth. The wealth of her sensitive and soulful intelligence gives a sudden and sparkling charm to the lines that they never before possessed; she captures an audience with one dash of genius, and

all hearts respond to the touch of nature with one mighty throb. She was in her most brilliant vein last night, and the vast audience gave her an ovation which was the noblest tribute that appreciation could render to genius. How strange that a woman who, as Ophelia, moves a thousand spectators to tears, should the next night call the spirit of laughter from the smiling sky and diffuse about her the delicious aroma of joy! At the conclusion of the performance Mr. Irving and Miss Terry were twice called before the curtain, and the immense audience cheered them to the echo. Seldom in this city has so great a popular demonstration been so well deserved. In the characters of Benedick and Hamlet, England's greatest actor has touched both poles of Shakespeare's universal genius, interpreting the poetry of joyous sunshine and the poetry of starless night. 'There's rosemary,' says Ophelia; 'that's for remembrance.' But those who have enjoyed Ellen Terry's exquisite art, who have followed her through the golden bowers of comedy or up the sublimest heights of pain, will need neither rosemary for remembrance nor pansies for kind thought."

After this, Campbell's idea that, inspired by the actor's art—

> Verse ceases to be airy thought,
> And sculpture to be dumb,

is prose. But there is no reason to believe that the eulogy of the Chicago press was a whit in excess of the popular sentiment.

Leaving Chicago, Mr. Irving and his company played for a few nights at Detroit and Toronto, and then reappeared at Boston. This engagement was financially the most brilliant of the whole series, the week's receipts reaching the unprecedented total of $24,000, and this in spite of the rival attractions of Mr. Booth's performances. The representations of Shakespeare during this visit were received with the most enthusiastic favour. I forbear to quote what was said of "Much Ado About Nothing." After the Chicago ebullitions, the Boston transports seem tame, though they were vigorous and comprehensive enough. The best testimony to the impression on the public mind was the wild excitement of the audience when, on the last night, Mr. Irving announced that he hoped to be in Boston again before the close of the present year. That demonstration was conclusive evidence that Mr. Irving had established himself in the good-will of the American people.

At Washington Mr. Irving enjoyed the advantage of an entirely new view of his Hamlet. Mr. Washington F. Peddrick, whose name ought to be as immortal as that of Jefferson Brick, declared that it would be difficult for Mr. Irving "to appreciate Hamlet even by study," and that "the strong probability" was that "he had never studied Hamlet except so far as acquiring the text is essential to his playing the part." Admirable suggestion! Mr. Irving has been playing Hamlet for ten years in the belief, shared by a considerable number of persons, that study and experience have given him a growing command of the character; but here is Mr. Washington F. Peddrick, who tells him that he is mistaken. He has only learned the words. And yet, "in his delirium after the revelations of the Ghost, in the bitterness of his self-condemnation and his plot against the King, in his tirade at Ophelia, in the vindictiveness and triumph of the play-scene, in the virulence with which he overwhelms his mother, and in his final assault on the King—in these he was great." That all this should be done by a man who has merely learned the words seems singular. But Mr. Washington F. Peddrick has other surprises for us. Mr. Irving, he admits, is "too

intelligent a man not to understand the delicate shades of feeling characteristic of Hamlet." This is pretty well for the actor who has "never studied" the part. True, Mr. Irving did not appear to advantage in the interviews with the Ghost, and failed to please his critic in the famous soliloquy in the third act, which "an angel might have spoken without a blush"—though I believe that an angel would blush before Mr. Washington F. Peddrick; but in the scene with Ophelia, the actor "introduced so many new points, and passed so quickly and nervously from one state of mind to another, that for the first time in the play he rose equal to the occasion." The magnanimity of Mr. Washington F. Peddrick is even more striking than his penetration. An inferior man who started with the theory that Mr. Irving had never studied Hamlet, would have carefully adhered to it; but the generous Peddrick forgets all about it at the first opportunity. Still, he feels bound to say that "the dialogue with the grave-digger was divested of that serious philosophic interest which should characterise it," and that Mr. Irving committed the mistake of dying while the spectators turned their backs on him. Most people are under the impression that Hamlet addresses his last words

to Horatio, but Mr. Washington F. Peddrick, who *has* studied the text, knows better. "Hamlet dies addressing the spectators," who, according to Mr. Irving's arrangement, contemplate the dead bodies of the King and Queen, like the foolish courtiers that they are. After this and other opinions, equally new and remarkable, it is not surprising to find Mr. Washington F. Peddrick maintaining that "there is no originality" in Mr. Irving's acting, "except so far as he himself is original." Mr. Irving is not original except when he is original. America has every reason to be proud of Mr. Washington F. Peddrick, whose originality is beyond dispute.

Probably it was to sustain Mr. Irving under this searching criticism that President Arthur and many members of Congress visited the theatre during the actor's stay at Washington, and paid him social attentions of a highly complimentary kind. Leaving the capital, Mr. Irving sought to drown recollections of Washington F. Peddrick in a round of one night engagements in New England, and then, with his equanimity partially restored, reappeared at Philadelphia and Brooklyn, the second visit in each case being considerably more successful than the first. On March 31st, Mr.

Irving began his final engagement in New York with "Much Ado About Nothing," which was received with the unbounded favour it had won in other cities. The public and the critics agreed that no more admirable representation of the comedy had ever been seen on the American stage. Of Mr. Irving's Benedick, Mr. Winter wrote, after a little essay on the actor's "subtle playfulness," that "his Benedick, to be sure, amuses, but is less amusing than charming. In this part the playfulness is that of an odd, quaint fellow, eccentric although elegant, and although volatile and nimble on occasion, mostly observant, quizzical, fond of sagacious rumination, and slightly saturnine. If this is Shakespeare's Benedick, Mr. Irving has exactly reproduced him. If not, he has exalted him, intellectually and by personal traits, to a place among the gentle and sprightly satirical thinkers of the Shakespearian world. And this, we think, expresses his real achievement—that he has substituted a complex nature, based on goodness, merrily pretending to cynicism, and having rich reserves, for the dashing, predominant, sonorous gallant, known since Charles Kemble's day as the Benedick of the stage."

That in the raillery of Miss Terry's Beatrice is

found "the indescribable charm of mischievous sweetness," that "the silver arrows of her pungent wit have no barb," and that a "more fascinating personality than this Beatrice could not be wished," are propositions none will gainsay, whatever may be thought of the theory that in this play Mr. Irving and Miss Terry have departed from the poet's conception. But Mr. Winter was most careful to point out that "the chief deducible lesson" from this representation of "Much Ado About Nothing," was that, by contrast, most American acting was "too obviously acting; the wires are not concealed." "Under the instructive influence of Mr. Irving's performances, great numbers of persons have been made to understand this truth, which yet is not a new truth to any habitual thinker on the subject."

So great was the success of "Much Ado About Nothing" that it was played for nearly the whole of the month's engagement. On the last night Mr. Irving appeared in scenes from this comedy, and from "The Merchant of Venice," "Louis XI.," and "Charles I.;" but, as usual on such an occasion, not the least interesting feature of the evening was the farewell speech. Mr. Irving took leave of his American public with a regret con-

siderably tempered by the prospect of a speedy return. "If all be well," he said, "we shall return next autumn full of hopeful anticipation, and to our friends at home we shall say, 'We are returning for a parting embrace—a six months' embrace.' I am sure that our dear land, which has the first place in our hearts, will not begrudge us the affection we bear to America, which you, out of the depths of your kindness, have conjured up." Mr. Irving could say with truth, "You have shown that upon the broad platform of a noble art the two greatest sections of the English-speaking race are one nation. You have shown that no jealous love of your own admirable actors has prevented you from the recognizing the earnest purpose of an English company; and we shall return to our homes with the conviction that new as our methods may have been, you have set the stamp of undisguised approval on them."

All this represents no mere rhetorical effort. The simple fact could not have been more simply stated. It found more emphatic expression in the New York journals. "Irving's personality," said the *Tribune*, "has deeply impressed itself upon our theatre and upon the thought-culture of our time, and will be felt in artistic and social life for many,

many a year in the long hereafter of American progress." Even more gratifying was the testimony of a journal which at the outset had said much in Mr. Irving's dispraise. "Irving's work, taken in its entirety," said the *New York World*, "has fixed his status in the somewhat chaotic art of the stage, and in the minds of the thoughtful public, as that of a great and original artist who has brought back to the stage the almost lost gift of impersonation as distinguished from mere representation." By other writers who had shown a strong disposition to cavil, it was admitted that Mr. Irving had conquered his public, and that his audiences grew continuously; indeed, it would have been difficult to gainsay this in the face of the receipts for the tour, which amounted to more than £80,000, the largest total on record. Most significant of all was the admission that Shylock, which some persons had hastily pronounced at first to be utterly insignificant, became one of the most popular of Mr. Irving's impersonations. In England the sum of Mr. Irving's success was aptly described by the *Times*: "Mr. Irving has vindicated for his vocation a definite position among the serious arts. He has been accepted in the United States with distinguished honour in

virtue of his championship of the right and duty of the dramatic art to be a fine art. The remarkable success he has achieved is a gratifying sign of the willingness of public opinion in America to co-operate with that of England to rescue the stage from the lower level to which it has sometimes sunk."

If ever a man had reason to carry away with him the most favourable impressions of America, that man was the actor of whom an American tragedian enthusiastically said, "Irving is one of our institutions: he has endeared himself to my countrymen." Probably Mr. Irving formed his preferences in the States; but if he liked one city more than another, he learned to be wary in his praises. When asked how Chicago "compared with New York," he replied that he was told in Chicago "that if New York kept on progressing it would in time become the Chicago of the East." But he admitted that he found his most enthusiastic audiences in Boston and Chicago, and was especially warm in his recognition of the Western preference of Shakespeare to melodrama. American theatres Mr. Irving found to be admirable in the arrangements for the comfort of the audience, and lamentably defective in those for the comfort

of the actors. But on two points only did he appear to cherish painful recollections. He denounced the recklessness of "the baggage-smashers" on the railways, who ruined a good deal of his scenery; and he declared Indianapolis to be, so far as appreciation of the drama was concerned, the most stupid community under heaven. There were too many "fat ladies" in the place, and too many people who were content to spend an afternoon for ten cents in a dog show. The blank verse plays, which he received from native dramatists during his stay in America, seemed to him, with one or two exceptions, to be admirably suited to Indianapolis. Other places had their peculiarities. There was one theatre where the orchestra was so primitive that the gentleman who performed on the violoncello provided that instrument with only three strings. When he was asked whether he intended to reduce the number on the second night, he said, "I am a man of method, and having begun on three strings, I shall finish on three strings."

Miss Terry's impressions of America denoted a very expansive contentment. She thought American playgoers remarkable for their "friendship and cleverness." She found "the handsomest

women in New York, the prettiest girls in Chicago and Baltimore." When asked which were the most intellectual, she said they were "all intellectual." She was delighted with everything she had seen, and even spoke kindly of the "American dude." "Happy to meet, sorry to part, and happy to meet again," was her last sentiment about the Americans; and it was fully reciprocated by a great public when the two English artists sailed from the shores on which they had found so brilliant a welcome, and had left a lasting memorial of most notable triumphs.

CHAPTER IX.

AMERICAN CRITICISM.

IT is not unreasonable to expect that the reader will draw from this narrative of Mr. Irving's tour in America the conclusion that the actor was rewarded with a very rare measure of success. Let us take some of its most salient features; and first, that achievement of which there is the least, if any, challenge. Mr. Irving's method of presenting Shakespeare has been a liberal education to his American audiences. This is admitted even by writers not disposed on other grounds to be friendly. They have not declared, with an ingenious but perverse writer in this country, that the "compromise" between idealism and realism on the stage is "a hybrid and nondescript art"—as if there were any-

thing hybrid in the appropriate scenery and the careful stage-management of a great play. The idea that fine acting must necessarily suffer from harmonious accessories—and that there is something inconsistent between tragic passion and a well-painted back-ground, between the art of the tragedian and the effective grouping of his subordinates—has not dawned on the American mind. And yet there are fine stage traditions in America. Passionately fond of the theatre, the people flatter themselves, with reason, that they know what good acting is. They have given prosperity and fame not to one, but to a group of native tragedians. But the English actor has taught them, and they have thankfully accepted the lesson, that Shakespeare means vastly more when he is acted by a well-trained company, and illustrated by stage-pictures which please the eye without distracting the mind, than when everything is subordinated to one personality.

I do not care to reproduce all that American writers have written on this head. Much of it must have been exceedingly disagreeable to at least one actor of great and deserved popularity in the United States. A St. Louis writer, with that racy vigour which is characteristic of

American journalism, said that the advent of Mr. Irving had ended the career of the "barn-stormers," who, with their companies of "sticks," and the miserable shifts which they called scenery, were bidden to vanish for evermore. I should be exceedingly sorry to call Mr. Booth a "barn-stormer;" but it is unquestionable that much of the responsibility for the shortcomings of the American stage is laid by his countrymen at his door. "The English actor has set a Shakespearian standard," said a writer not given to extravagance in praising Mr. Irving. "He produces great works in a great way. He trains his actors, looks to his archæology, and presents beautiful and impressive stage effects. His own acting is shown amidst noble, lovely surroundings. Nothing is left undone by him that can be done." And then comes the contrast. Mr. Booth's actors are reproved with something more than severity. His manner of producing plays is altogether condemned. "You have seen how splendidly Mr. Irving presents 'The Merchant of Venice'—a presentation full of colour, music, and poetic fancy. The whole work permeates the observer, because it is illustrated by harmonious effort and beautiful effect." But Mr. Booth's

"Merchant of Venice" was "tumbled on the stage. The scenery was absurd, the acting wrong, and the whole work mutilated to fit one character." This may be exaggerated and unjust, but it shows how deeply the Americans have felt the difference between the methods of one of their most notable actors and the methods of the English tragedian. And they have been thus moved, not because they have an instinctive hankering after stage pageantry, but because they see that Mr. Irving infuses poetry into his pictures, spends mind as well as money on them, and devotes himself heart and soul to every detail of his business. The English reader must not suppose that American actors never take all these pains. We have seen in Mr. Lawrence Barrett's performances in London the influences of high culture. Mr. Booth's later representations are said to have shown a welcome improvement. But the standard set by Mr. Irving marks the beginning of a revolutionary era in the history of the American stage. "Our public are not likely to forget," says the *Atlantic Monthly*, "that they owe to him representations of Shakespeare which have done more to educate the community, and which have given, on the whole, more complete

satisfaction and refined pleasure, than any others which the American stage has ever known." Similar expressions might be multiplied almost indefinitely. It is sufficient to say that on this point American opinion is unanimous.

But this is not all. Mr. Irving is entitled to say that his personal reputation as an actor has been emphatically endorsed by the American public. He has every reason to be content with the judgment of the majority of his critics. There has been much diversity of opinion about his performances, but in America, as in England, he has won the great mass of playgoers to his side. It is refreshing to find that the vexed question of the mannerisms has not prevented American critics from appreciating all the refinements of the English actor's art and the full force of his genius. To writers who can do naught but harp on the mannerisms, I would commend this useful passage from one of Mr. Winter's articles:

"We are very far from desiring or intending to commend ungraceful demeanour, fantastic stage tricks, or defective elocution. But it is our duty to see, and to say, that the art of acting is a complex art, made up of many arts; that we must not suppose it is an actor's business always

to be graceful in his attitudes and movements, or always to be regular and polished in his periods and enunciation; that every artist has a way of his own by which he reaches his results; and that a sound judgment will never allow itself to be blinded or embarrassed by the caprices of taste. As far as he now stands disclosed upon this stage Mr. Irving is a thorough and often a magnificent artist, one who makes even his defects to help him, and one who leaves nothing to blind and whirling chance; and if the light that shines through his work be not the light of genius, we know not what it can be."

If it be said that this writer was Mr. Irving's eulogist from the first—though, for that matter, Mr. Winter has shown perfect independence—I take at random the testimony of a writer whose earliest verdict was far from enthusiastic. During his first visit to Philadelphia Mr. Irving had the opportunity of reading a great deal about his demerits in the *Philadelphia Press*. When he returned to that city, the same journal candidly confessed that further study of the man was apt to modify unfavourable impressions. "One of the most marked features of his performances during the week has been the constant

illustration of the success with which Mr. Irving conquers prejudices, the rapid and constant gain that he makes upon the respect and admiration of his audience, and the comparative ease and completeness with which we forget those mannerisms and strong individualities of method, speech, expression, and walk, which in an inferior actor would be fatal to any dramatic triumphs. There is not a play in Mr. Irving's repertory which does not impress an audience more favourably on a second hearing. It was really singular to observe how people who at first saw nothing but what was awkward, ungainly, and laughable in Mr. Irving when he first came, forgot it all when they had an opportunity to see and judge fairly of his great merits as an actor and a dramatic artist."

Even more interesting is that category of witnesses who, while anxious to deny to Mr. Irving the meed of a great actor, are constrained to admit so much that the denial is scarcely intelligible. The most noteworthy of these is Mr. Henry Clapp, who wrote an article on Mr. Irving in the *Atlantic Monthly* for March, 1884. A good deal lower in the scale is Mr. Ranken Towse, who liberated his soul in the *Century* for the same month. Mr. Towse found as much to admire in

the Mathias as Mr. Irving's greatest eulogist has ever seen; but he came to the conclusion that, after all, it was a work of "physiognomical research." Though the actor showed "rich imagination, true dramatic instinct, and thorough mastery of stage resource;" though he conveyed the impression of "a horrible nervous exaltation;" though the dream scene brought the impersonation to "a most striking, pitiful, and imaginative climax"—yet, somehow, all this was merely the result of "patient practice of the facial muscles, an artistic perception of the picturesque in pose, and a knowledge of the principles of gesture as dogmatically taught by Delsarte." The spectators were not charmed by the illusion, but only admired the executive skill of the performer. Then comes the wonderful statement that such an impersonation does not need "the glow of genius," because that would raise it "above the level of ordinary humanity." So, according to the principles of the drama dogmatically taught by Mr. Towse, there must be something extraordinary in humanity before genius can condescend to touch it. Summon up all the human types which have been endeared to us—because they are simple men and women—by the genius of some of our

greatest writers, and you will see that genius has been guilty of a sad waste of time. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin," says the master-spirit; but Mr. Towse has decided that with touches of nature genius has nothing to do.

I turn from this remarkable dictum to the opinion of another American writer who has more than Mr. Towse's experience, and vastly more than his comprehension. "Mathias is only an ex-innkeeper, now a burgomaster in a village of Alsace, who has done a murder. But Mr. Irving, far transcending the conditions supplied by his authors, personates Mathias in such a way as to lift him into the domain of poetry, and make him a character representative—as long as the stage shall possess a history, or art shall be recognized among men—of the action of great remorse in a greatly sensitive soul. Define him as you like, call him by what name you please, and prove by invincible logic that he figures in one of the thinnest and weakest of all possible plays, the fact remains that this Mathias of Mr. Irving's is worthy to stand beside the highest type of human remorse that you can summon out of all the literature of the past. Manfred is not more picturesque, nor does he suffer more, nor does he impart a more

significant moral lesson—notwithstanding his sublime surroundings and his magnificent blank verse." I have little doubt that in the general judgment this is much nearer the truth than Mr. Towse's assertions, and that his attempt to credit the actor with the capacity of realizing all the attributes of a character without entering into its heart and soul, is disposed of effectually by such a simple truth as this: "It is what Mr. Irving has done with his various characters—his getting inside of them, and making them live as actual men—that shows his superlative excellence as an actor."

After this it is not surprising to find that Mr. Towse does not in the least understand Mr. Irving's Charles, Louis, or Shylock, that his ideal of passion is apparently a good loud roar, and that an actor who does not roar when Mr. Towse thinks he ought to roar is grossly inconsistent. The trial-scene in "The Merchant of Venice" is, Mr. Towse admits, very fine, considered by itself; but Shylock here is incongruous with what has gone before, and therefore his exit from the court loses all its effect, and the whole performance is "absolutely bad." Having got a theory, this critic proves it to his own satisfaction. In the earlier part of the play, he says, Mr. Irving empha-

sizes all that is sordid and malignant in the Jew, and "mainly disregards" his pride of race and religion, and his family affections. It follows that his "transformation" in the court, when he displays a pathetic dignity, is utterly out of harmony with his conception. The only answer that need be made to this is that Mr. Towse is the sole discoverer of this incongruity, and that nothing can be further from the fact than that Mr. Irving suppresses or subdues the higher instincts of Shylock at any point of the play. If anything could fully testify to the falsity of Mr. Towse's judgment, it would be the great popularity which Mr. Irving's Shylock enjoys amongst the Jews, who have proclaimed it as the vindication of one of the best-abused types of their nation.

If Mr. Towse knows little of Shylock, his ignorance of Hamlet is complete. In Mr. Irving's performance of this character, Mr. Towse can see no originality worth mentioning—no subtlety, but much careful thought of "the possible significance of lines and words," and the invention of "illustrative business." For this thought and invention Mr. Towse has a delicate disdain. He allows to the actor a "fertility in all the expedients of gesture and expression," but somehow these are ut-

terly useless in the tragic scenes. "Not a gleam of tragic fire" could Mr. Towse perceive in the scenes with the Ghost, Ophelia, and the Queen; and as for the play-scene which has thrilled a good many people, Mr. Towse does not condescend to mention it. He evidently likes a Hamlet who can shout at large, who does not trouble himself to think deeply, and who makes it perfectly plain to all beholders that his madness is a mere pretence. Mr. Towse complains that one never knows whether this Hamlet is mad or not. Polonius believes in the madness, but the King has a very grave doubt of it. How exceedingly ridiculous for these personages to differ when Mr. Towse considers that there ought to be only one opinion on the subject! That Hamlet is a man whose nervous system is overwrought; that, though feigning madness, he is sometimes carried to the borderline between sanity and hysteria; that this is of the very essence of the character—these things are still undreamt of in the philosophy of Mr. Towse.

It is scarcely necessary to say that the critic of the *Century* shows his originality in all branches of his subject. After reading everything which has been written about Mr. Irving for many years, I can confidently assure Mr. Towse that

none but himself can be his parallel. He has not even taken the trouble to learn the facts of Mr. Irving's career, or to read the history of the English stage during the last quarter of a century. "Of genius," says Mr. Towse, "Mr. Irving has shown no trace. His most fervent admirers declare that he has it; but if so, it is difficult to account for his failure to manifest it during the twenty years of constant acting which preceded his first successful engagement. Genius is not likely to remain hidden under a bushel, or anywhere else, when it has every chance to declare itself." Now here is a pretty good test of Mr. Towse's competence. Every statement in this passage is absolutely wrong. Mr. Irving did not act constantly for twenty years before his first successful engagement. He had been on the stage fourteen years when he played Digby Grant, which Mr. Towse takes to have been his first conspicuous exploit. But what would this critic's statement prove, even if it were true? What were the actor's opportunities before he played Mathias, which was the actual revelation to London playgoers of his extraordinary powers? With characteristic inaccuracy Mr. Towse says that "this triumph"—that is, Digby Grant—"emboldened him and his

manager to venture a step further and try Mathias." Mr. Towse's method of writing history is as trustworthy as his method of writing criticism. As a matter of fact, Digby Grant had nothing whatever to do with the production of "The Bells." The prelude to Mathias was Alfred Jingle—a character as remote from imaginative melodrama as anything that can be conceived. My point is that the genius which found its first real expression in "The Bells," had not at any time previously had the smallest opportunity of such a manifestation. The conditions of our stage during Mr. Irving's apprenticeship made it impossible for him to get full scope for his abilities. Managers shuddered at the bare suggestion of experiments in tragedy. They believed that the public cared for nothing but comedy and stereotyped melodrama. Shakespeare was banished from the stage. The drama was, with some exceptions, icebound in conventionality and commonplace. Mr. Irving waited long for his opportunity, and when it came he won a triumph in the play which most judges had pronounced to be an impossbility. And yet Mr. Towse calmly affirms that if Mr. Irving had genius, it would not have remained under a bushel "when it had every chance to declare itself." Probably he has never

heard that Mrs. Siddons's first appearance on the London stage was a failure; that for years Edmund Kean was a harlequin, and then a neglected stock-actor in the provinces; that Macready was long thought by his companions to be fit only for Rob Roy, and that his pertinacious inquiry, "When are we going to play Shakespeare?" was a standing joke in the company. The genius of Signor Salvini nobody disputes, and yet he had been thirty-three years on the stage before English playgoers had ever even heard his name.

Mr. Henry Clapp is a critic of a very different calibre from Mr. Towse. He, at all events, is able to write about a Shakespearian character without making obvious blunders. He does not say that Mr. Irving's Shylock is "incongruous;" he says "the outlines of the character are drawn with a firm and skilful hand." Nor does he commit himself to the eccentric proposition that in "Hamlet" Mr. Irving's elaboration of thought leads to "mental confusion." On the contrary, he makes Mr. Towse look rather foolish by emphatically declaring that "the artist's intelligence in this impersonation constantly shines with electric clearness," and that "there is scarcely a sentence which does not receive a new illumination from his action or

utterance." But not content with answering Mr. Towse, Mr. Clapp answers himself. Mr. Irving's lack of "temperamental impetus" compels him to accomplish his tragic effects by "a series of light disconnected touches or dabs." Yet elsewhere I find Mr. Clapp admitting that so perfect is the harmony of Mr. Irving's style, that "no touch is made so much for its own sake as for its contribution to the general effect." Not only this, but Mr. Irving has the gift of "intensity" which I presume to be part of a "temperamental impetus;" and as he "never relaxes the grip which he at once takes upon his part," it is difficult to see how his effects can be "disconnected." Mr. Clapp's article abounds in these contradictions, but his supreme effort in this line is his judgment of Hamlet and Mathias. Of the latter he says, with effusion, that "the spirit of the character may be said to pervade the representation as the soul, according to certain metaphysicians, pervades the body, 'being all in the whole, and all in every part.'" If this does not mean that Mr. Irving exercises the creative faculty in a very rare degree, what does it mean? And yet Mr. Clapp is also of opinion that Mr. Irving has not the soul of the creative artist, but obtains his effects by "the

deliberative, cumulative work of the mind." More surprising is the criticism of Hamlet. To Mr. Clapp's praises of Mr. Irving's intellectual power and artistic skill in this impersonation it is impossible to add one word. Mr. Towse, if he is willing to acquire more than a rudimentary knowledge of Hamlet, must be pleased to learn on Mr. Clapp's authority that Mr. Irving is able "to show the superfine sanity which constantly characterises Hamlet's wildest utterances, and yet to indicate his dangerous nearness to that madness with which 'great wit is ever allied.'" If we are to believe Mr. Clapp, Mr. Irving is a perfect master of all the subtle phases of Hamlet's mind, of "the deep affectionateness" of his nature, and succeeds in making him "human, loveable, and reasonably comprehensible." What more can be said? Why, this—that even with all these advantages Mr. Irving fails to display emotional genius. After admitting so much, Mr. Clapp deliberately repudiates the essence of his admissions. Mr. Irving "never attains a lofty, emotional pitch even for a moment." This is positive enough, but with perverse inconsistency Mr. Clapp immediately remembers "one instance to the contrary." He lays down an absolute rule, and then promptly

discovers an exception. In the play-scene Mr. Irving displays an emotional power to which Mr. Clapp conscientiously does fitting justice, and which, he says, "always produces a strong thrill in the audiences." Conscious that he has destroyed his own case, the critic desperately asserts that this is an "isolated" instance, and that "Mr. Irving accomplishes all the best effect of the scene without the help of any comprehensible speech." I appeal to the mass of playgoers to say whether they have not followed the whole of the scene with breathless interest from the beginning of the play which catches the conscience of the king, feeling the force of every syllable that Hamlet utters, spell-bound by the actor's emotional and nervous force, and finally carried away by the splendid frenzy of his excitement.

I do not maintain that Mr. Irving's success in tragedy is uniform. It is not given to any tragic actor to succeed equally well in all characters. Great as Salvini is, supreme as his Othello is, his Macbeth, when he first played it, was, by his own admission, "pallid and colourless;" and when he essayed it again in this country nine years later, it was little more than a respectable performance. In Lear he failed to hold his audience, and his

Hamlet signally lacked most essential qualities. Whatever Mr. Irving's comparative failures may have been, Hamlet is his highest achievement; and the futility of struggling with this fact is amusingly shown by Mr. Clapp's assertion that Hamlet, after all, is not tragic, but only "a character part."

It will not be surprising if the reader comes to the conclusion that there is too much of the metaphysical, too much wire-drawn distinction, in these disquisitions. The responsibility is not mine. I have endeavoured to show that the most conspicuous attempts in America to detract from Mr. Irving's reputation recoil on the heads of their authors. Perhaps the best summary of the whole matter is the candid confession of Mr. Clapp: "After all is said, I find there is a certain charm in Mr. Irving's performances which has not been accounted for, which defies analysis, and refuses even to be described, but which is strangely potent on the imagination of the spectator." To this complexion all these critics come at last. The charm which defies their analysis is the charm of genius, and to this the vast majority of American, as of English, playgoers are content to bear the simple testimony of unfeigned applause.

CHAPTER X.

THE SECRET OF SUCCESS.

A GREAT actor's public may be divided into three classes. There are the people who are profoundly moved by his acting, but do not analyse their impressions; there are others who admire him with a due, sometimes an over-due, appreciation of his faults; then, there are the sceptics who will rarely, if ever, admit that they admire him at all, and many of whom positively hate him with a fervour equalled only by that of his most enthusiastic partisans. Some actors have excited less of this opposition than others; but to suppose that a great actor ever lived who commanded the suffrages of all his contemporaries is to show a singular ignorance of stage history, and even of

human nature. Of no actor could it ever have been said with truth that he was—

> "A man so varied that he seemed to be,
> Not one, but all mankind's epitome."

Were such a phenomenon possible, he would be universally admired. But the necessary limitations of human capacity make it inevitable that a great actor should appeal much less forcibly to one mind than to another. Of two intelligent men, the one may think the actor's faults eclipsed by his merits, and the other may be simply unable to enter into the charmed circle of sympathy. Mr. Irving himself has aptly remarked that not the least of an actor's difficulties is, that while this section of society regards him as a wonder of merit, that may think him a phenomenon of incapacity. It is not in the theatre only that this difference of opinion is to be found. In political life party feeling runs quite as high ; and while Mr. Gladstone is for the majority of his countrymen a great statesman, to a very considerable number of persons he is a windbag.

All this is a truism, though to some astute critics of Mr. Irving, who have racked their brains to discover the secret of his almost unexampled

success, it is a grave anomaly. One of them has written a book to prove that he is a reasonable admirer of the actor. There was a time when he was an unbeliever—when, in fact, he wrote a pamphlet against Mr. Irving, remarkable for nothing but impertinent gibes. Since then Mr. William Archer[1] has, according to his own admission, passed through "the phase of dislike and struggling respect" to what he calls a rational appreciation of Mr. Irving. His book contains a good deal which is both true and ingenious, but much of the old Adam of his unregenerate days clings to him still. Just as one begins to think that at last there has arisen a dramatic critic who has hit the happy mean between adulation and furious antipathy, Mr. Archer lapses into blunders which almost destroy all faith in his capacity to apprehend facts. "There has probably never been an actor of equal prominence," he writes of Mr. Irving, "whose talent, nay, whose mere competence, has been so much contested. He is the idol of a select circle of devotees; but even it is small, and its fervour is apt to be tempered with apology. The great public regards him with

[1] "Henry Irving. A Critical Study." By William Archer.

interest and respect rather than with enthusiasm; or if with enthusiasm, then it is for his success rather than his talent, since with the British public success is now the strongest title to admiration." Here may be asked an obvious question, which is somewhat disturbing to Mr. Archer's neat little chain of assumptions. If Mr. Irving has only an apologetic circle of devotees, and if the great public admires nothing but his success, how came he to succeed? The maxim that "nothing succeeds like success" is, generally speaking, the maundering commonplace of disappointed dulness. Mr. Archer is by no means dull; yet it has never occurred to him that Mr. Irving must, some time or other, have captivated the great public, or he would never have succeeded at all. There was one loophole of escape Mr. Archer might have had from this dilemma; but he has dexterously blocked it up. He might have said that Mr. Irving's mannerisms had grown so intolerable that the great public had ceased to admire his talent. But Mr. Archer conscientiously admits that the actor "has of late years gained considerable control over his mannerisms, and effected a decided improvement in method." A critic who gratuitously lands himself in a difficulty like this cannot complain

if people reject his guidance and question his authority.

"Towards some great actors," proceeds Mr. Archer, "men have felt the warmest personal gratitude, as though towards benefactors whom they had to thank for the profoundest emotions of their lives. These it would have required some courage to criticise, since in some of their parts, at least, general consent pronounced them ideally great." If Mr. Archer would study contemporary criticism of Garrick, Kean, and Kemble, he would have some trouble in discovering this "general consent." "Towards Mr. Irving," he continues, "there is no such feeling among the thousands who flock to his theatre." There is a modest pretension for you! Mr. Archer claims to speak not for himself alone—which would be easy, and comparatively unimportant—but for the thousands who flock to the Lyceum. Thought-reading, as it is usually practised, is nothing to this. Mr. Archer is a much more wonderful person than Mr. Irving Bishop. Mr. Bishop professes to know what is passing through the mind of one person at a time; but the omniscient Archer is familiar with the innermost thoughts of multitudes all at once. "The crowded audiences at the Lyceum,"

he says, "as a rule applaud but feebly," and the explanation is that "the great majority are intellectually interested, not emotionally excited." Not that it is necessary for an audience profoundly moved to applaud vigorously. Mr. Archer admits that audiences may be as quiet as mice, and yet feel the electric thrill of sympathy with the actor. "It is this thrill of sympathy, fusing the whole audience into one man, and that man all eye and heart, which is conspicuously absent from the Lyceum." Mr. Archer has never been moved—"absolutely never"—by Mr. Irving; therefore, the thousands who flock to the Lyceum are never moved. Strange to say, however, Mr. Irving's Charles I. is "a noble and beautiful" portrait, which, "if it were only as true to history as it is to Vandyke, would be perfect." Though he is "absolutely never" moved by Mr. Irving, Mr. Archer confesses to "a lump in the throat" during this performance. True, the lump never grows larger, but it is highly satisfactory to know that Mr. Archer has one lump. He is perfectly conscious of his own inconsistency, for he attempts to prove that the last scene in "Charles I."—one of the most affecting in the whole range of the drama—"plays itself." Mr. Irving "does little to accen-

tuate the effect;" it is not the actor, but the situation which makes Mr. Archer's small lump, and all the lumps of exactly the same size in the throats of the "thousands" he knows so well.

There is something almost pathetic in this predicament of an intelligent man who has confidently started with a theory which breaks down at the first real test, and who tries to cover his self-contradiction with ridiculously transparent little quibbles. Mr. Archer has, to use a popular phrase, knocked the bottom out of his own tub. The assumption that a part or a scene "plays itself" is a characteristic of people who are unable or unwilling to see how it is played. It may be affirmed with a confidence rather more justifiable than Mr. Archer's, that if Mr. Irving had to "accentuate the effect" of the last parting between Charles and his Queen, he would spoil the whole incident. It is because there is no apparent effort in the actor's art, no straining after a point, no trick of tone or gesture, nothing but the dignity and simplicity of a great sorrow, that Mr. Irving's auditors are moved to the tears which Mr. Archer has never seen. The Queen is torn by hysterical grief; but the noble resignation of the "martyr king" is the last and most perfect

touch with which Mr. Irving completes a portrait which, in this scene at all events, is as true to history as the most zealous republican could wish.

Here is the secret of the actor's success which Mr. Archer, owing doubtless to his early training in hasty pamphlets, cannot find. To complain of Mr. Irving's peculiarities of speech and manner is legitimate enough within certain limits; but to say that he has no command of the emotions of his audience, that they never feel the electric thrill of his personality, and that they do not regard him as a personal benefactor, is wholly and ludicrously wrong. It is a simple fact which can be easily attested by those who are in a position to know, that Mr. Irving has received more tokens of the personal gratitude of a vast mass of playgoers than probably ever fell to the lot of any of his predecessors. These people may be what Mr. Archer calls "uncritical," but they have somehow been moved to testify to Mr. Irving that his art has given them some of the most exquisite pleasure of their lives. Now and then, playgoers whose manners have not that repose which stamps the caste of Mr. Archer, have shown their affection for the actor by throwing gifts upon the stage from the gallery. One night at a provincial theatre a

brace of birds was flung down at Mr. Irving's feet. It was not what would be called a refined offering, and the man who threw it could not have been merely "intellectually interested" in the performance. Another time, a poor woman who had lost her son presented Mr. Irving with a gold cross in the same unintellectual way. Why do people behave like this if there is not in the actor some magic which stirs their hearts? From a totally different class of playgoers, from people who move in circles not commonly agitated by enthusiasm, Mr. Irving has received countless tributes, which show how great a minister of happiness he is in the lives of the donors. No actor could have been the object of such a display of emotion as was seen in the Lyceum on the last night of the season of 1883—when Mr. Archer was presumably absent—without commanding the deepest and most enduring gratitude of the playgoing world.

And the secret is that Mr. Irving is one of the most human and least artificial actors the English stage has ever known. He dominates that stage not simply by his intellect, on which Mr. Archer lavishes his precious balms. His intellect alone would never have enabled him to give us the most real and vivid Hamlet of our time. He has

truly said that in this impersonation, more than in any other, he has an unerring sense of the profound sympathy of his audiences. The philosophy of the melancholy prince they may not all understand; but the distracted lover of Ophelia, the tender son mourning for his murdered father, "cruel only to be kind" to his erring mother, torn by conflicting doubts, burning with righteous wrath and scathing satire against falsehood and crime, must live deep down in the remembrance of many thousands of men and women. What a multitude of exquisite touches attest the insight of the actor into this great creation of the poet! What tenderness in the filial injunction to the Ghost who bored in the earth so fast, "Rest, rest, perturbed spirit!" What a world of emotion in that last glance at the spot where the spirit of his father has disappeared after the awful revelation! What a terrible triumph in that vengeful cry when Hamlet springs upon the chair from which the king, affrighted by his conscience, has precipitately fled! What anguish in the appeal to Gertrude!

> "Mother, for love of grace,
> Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,
> That not your trespass but my madness speaks!"

Then, who can forget the horror-struck whisper, "Merciful God," of Louis XI. when he beholds the menacing figure of Nemours in his chamber? or the "Kill a man!" of Mathias, as compunction wrings his soul before the crime? or the frenzy which seizes Eugene Aram when he describes to Ruth how he murdered the ruffian, Daniel Clarke? All these, and many more, are passages in which Mr. Irving's admirers have felt the force of his inspiration. His detractors say that it is not inspiration, but only a remarkable ingenuity. There is no particular originality in the groundwork of Mr. Irving's conceptions, but a surprisingly minute inventiveness in the details. People who reason like this do not seem to have realised the truth that the art of acting is as complex as human nature itself. An actor who is content to produce one or two great effects does less for his art than the actor who strives to seize every subtle shade that can contribute to the portrait. But the fact is that Mr. Irving's aim, and in the main successful aim, is to make the character as a whole live in our memories. We do not remember his Hamlet or his Shylock simply for fits and starts of genius. The whole intricate personality of the man has been stamped

upon our minds. Mr. Irving has worked out the character from the core, and the presence of one central idea is felt amid all the mass of illustrative detail. This, I say, is the conviction of Mr. Irving's admirers, and it may be allowed to derive considerable force from the inability of his critics to agree with themselves or with one another. It is Mr. Archer who says that there is no essential originality in Mr. Irving's conceptions, but a great fertility of detail. On the other hand, an equally positive writer, who severely analysed Mr. Irving's Shylock in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, said that the conception was new and striking, and by an actor of great executive power might have been developed into an impersonation of extraordinary merit, but that Mr. Irving's execution reduced it to a sketch. Such contradictions may well make the general public prefer the actor's illumination to the clashing torches of his assailants.

Garrick astounded his contemporaries by thinking for himself. Mr. Irving has shown the same independence. Stage traditions have no value for him simply because they are stage traditions. "Traditions," he has said, "are often good; but, though excellent for those who invented them, they are often singularly bad for those who try to

carry them on." As actors are the most conservative race in the world, and regard tradition with such reverence that a man will not venture to go his own way round a table if his predecessors in the past have gone the other way, this doctrine is by most veterans treated as rank heresy. What Mr. Irving means is that if an actor does certain things, not because his intelligence is in them, but because they have been done by other actors from time immemorial, he will probably act badly. Mr. Irving's individuality has been perfectly unfettered by rules of this kind. When his talents began to strike his fellows as unusual, it was chiefly because of his singular capacity so to identify himself with a character that he seemed to think upon the stage. This is one of the most notable qualities for which Mr. Irving will be remembered. His delivery of the soliloquies of Hamlet and Iago is matchless. There is no effort whatever to make what actors call "points." There is no special regard for the cadence of blank verse which, according to old-fashioned ideas, it should be one of the chief aims of a Shakespearian actor to preserve. Here Mr. Irving has departed most conspicuously from tradition. He never gives his speeches like recitations,

smoothly and melodiously delivered. One remembers his best scenes less for the elocutionary display than for the intense dramatic fire, for the conviction brought home to the mind that the actor has mastered the very essence of his theme. "I will give you a year," he said to a young man who had gained some applause by a rattling delivery; "I will give you a year to learn that speech so that you shall make your audience imagine for the moment that you have not got it by heart." Mr. Irving's theory on this point is concisely put in his preface to a translation of "Talma on the Actor's Art." "Let the student remember, first, that every sentence expresses a new thought, and therefore frequently demands a change of intonation; secondly, that the thought precedes the word. Of course there are passages in which thought and language are borne along by the stream of emotion and completely intermingled. But more often it will be found that the most natural, the most seemingly accidental, effects are obtained when the working of the mind is visible before the tongue gives it words."

Some people find pleasure in the idea that, but for the beautiful scenery, the representations of Shakespeare at the Lyceum would not hold the

public for a week. This shows a strange forgetfulness that Mr. Irving made his reputation long before any splendour of accessories was thought of. But if lavish expenditure in scene painting and costumes be all that is needful to ensure success, why is not every manager as prosperous as Mr. Irving? If this is why Shakespeare pays him so well, why should not Shakespeare pay everybody? How was it that not so many years ago a London manager who had spent large sums on Shakespearian revivals issued the humiliating proclamation that "Shakespeare spells ruin"? "You all know," said Mr. Irving, in his speech to the actors at the Garrick Club, "that successful management of a theatre is no easy thing, though I am sometimes asked to believe that one has only to exhaust archæological detail and offer sumptuous scenery to ensure the success of a play, especially one by Shakespeare. A very excellent recipe for any enterprising speculator who may have a few thousands to throw away! No, my good friends; none know so well as you how thoughtless all such suggestions are. The success of 'Hamlet' which ran two hundred nights at the Lyceum, of 'The Merchant of Venice' which ran two hundred and fifty nights, though it was hurriedly

put upon the stage, of 'Richard III.,' 'Charles I.,' 'The Bells,' and many other plays proves the contrary. No, the earnestness of the actors, the study of the characters, rehearsals, and attention to details which will stimulate and not distract the attention of the auditors — therein lie the methods of success. I believe that all plays should be perfectly mounted. It is what actors and authors have been striving for from all time. Shakespeare tried it with properties, and I believe that if he were alive now he would try it with scenery. In striving to delineate the people created in plays, we must attempt to realise the places in which they lived. For myself I would as soon play 'Hamlet' with powder as without if nothing else were expected. But when something else is expected, it must be given; and I shall continue to bestow as much care upon a Shakespearian production as I should bestow upon the work of any modern playwright." Even more forcible is a passage in Mr. Irving's article in *Good Words*: "Will the candid reader tell me that there is no culture to be gained from as perfect a stage representation of Shakespeare as modern art can furnish? Is it nothing that while the spirit of the poet is preserved, his ideas are illustrated

by scholarly detail, by harmonious pictures, by appropriate music, by all that appeals to the sense of beauty? We do not quarrel with the novelist when he describes the scene in which his creatures live and move. How many famous passages in fiction can be quoted to show that a word-picture adds infinite force or charm to the most dramatic episode of human passion? So on the stage, the accessories which are perfectly attuned to the story must greatly enhance its fascination. I have heard that some people still hold that we should play Shakespeare very much as he was played in his own time. But is one art to stand still while others progress? or rather, is the stage to repudiate all the aids of painting and music, to disdain the fruits of historical inquiry, to shun the archæologist and the antiquarian? Would my readers like to banish pictures from their books? I am not pleading for pageants. Acting, and acting alone, can make a play successful; but let us acknowledge that by the legitimate arts of the stage, history and poetry may be illuminated for the dullest understanding, and a new zest added to the pleasures of refined taste."

But while Mr. Irving endeavours to combine essentials and externals in a harmonious whole,

he has a much greater regard for artistic fitness than for inartistic accuracy. It may surprise Mr. Archer to learn that people have been known to complain of Mr. Irving's callous indifference to pictorial detail. They demanded why Leonato in "Much Ado About Nothing" did not wear mourning for his daughter when it was given out that she was dead. What an unnatural father to go about arrayed in brilliant colours when his brother was in black! Was this the boasted accuracy of the Lyceum? The simple answer was that Mr. Irving refused to have his pictures spoilt by a lot of people in the trappings and the suits of woe. Absolute realism on the stage is, in his opinion, unendurable. But the critics who fancy that his mind is always running on details of scenery and dresses are profoundly ignorant of the man. These matters have their time and place, but his constant labour is to improve the acting. There is a rehearsal at the Lyceum. What is it—one, two, or three acts? It is the first scene in "Hamlet," which takes about ten minutes to play, and it is rehearsed for two hours. Everybody concerned, Horatio, Marcellus, Bernardo, Francisco, and the Ghost, have played this scene together very many times. But experience has

made Mr. Irving fastidous. This first scene is the key-note of the play. If it be not so struck that the interest of the audience is at once aroused, the play will flag, and the other performers will have more than their fair share of work to give it life and movement.

No wonder that Mr. Edwin Booth declared that, in his opinion, Mr. Irving as a stage-manager was unrivalled.[1] The master-mind is visible throughout the entire representation. Mr. Irving has formed a distinct and broad conception not only of his own part, but of the whole scheme and purpose of the play. His crowds do not comport themselves like marionettes, nor as if they had been well-drilled. They seem to have caught the spirit of the scene, and to enter spontaneously into it. Look at the crowd who watch the trial in "The Merchant of Venice." Note especially the knot of Jews in the corner. They have come to see the triumph of Shylock. Some of them are very old, and nearly deaf. But they catch a word now and then, and exult over the tenacity with which their co-religionist asserts his bond against the hated Christian. But the tide

[1] See Appendix.

of fortune turns, and Shylock is suddenly overwhelmed. Confusion and dismay seize upon the Jews. You see them eagerly debating this unexpected reverse. Then their heads drop in despair, and they glide out of the court which they had entered with a confident belief in victory, while the bystanders chuckle over their discomfiture. That this subsidiary little drama greatly enhances the effect of the scene in the foreground need scarcely be said. It is one of the innumerable proofs of Mr. Irving's imaginative grasp, which people who are not over-gifted with imagination condescendingly call "ingenuity." Yet such ingenuity affords a better illustration of the poet than the most brilliant commentary that was ever written.

All this mastery is the product of a subtle insight, developed by an experience the extent of which has probably never been equalled. One man in his time plays many parts; but Mr. Irving has already played the astonishing number of 649, and if he is spared will play a great many more. Is it surprising that his perception of character has been trained to the finest point of delicate discernment? Not very long ago he was watching a most admirable actor playing in the third

act of "Richelieu." "Don't you think," said a friend, "that Richelieu's grief and despair were very finely shown?" "Yes; but at the crisis he took out his handkerchief and wiped his moustache. Richelieu would never have done that."

"But what we miss in Irving is simplicity," say some. "There is great intellectual grasp no doubt; but there is a want of freshness, and a haunting sense of the artificial." Well, no actor is always at his best, and the art may not always be concealed. Still, I wish that those who find Mr. Irving artificial had shared an experience I had some two or three years ago. The Baroness Burdett-Coutts has a kind of home and school for girls in the East end of London, and one winter evening Mr. Irving went down there to give a reading to some exceedingly homely folk, old men and women among the number. He selected a story of Mrs. Gaskell's, in which an only son turns out a villain, and actually attempts to rob his own father's house. The most touching part of the tale was the scene in the court at the young man's trial, when his father and mother were called to give evidence against him. For an hour and a half Mr. Irving held that assembly hanging on his words, for he read the story with a simplicity,

truth, and pathos which went home to every heart.

Another reason assigned by Mr. Archer in explanation of Mr. Irving's success is the most curious of all. Mr. Irving's admirers—the small circle of devotees—are untiring in their proclamations of his talents, while his detractors are comparatively passive. Mr. Archer attaches too little importance to his own exploits. There never was an actor of distinction who had to encounter more persistent detraction than has attended Mr. Irving at every stage of his career since he became a man of mark. Of the efforts to overthrow him at a critical juncture in his rise to eminence enough has already been said. He came triumphantly out of the ordeal not, as Mr. Archer seems to suppose, because his personal following was small and the general public coldly respectful, but because his genius and resolution carried everything before them. This is a matter not of opinion but of history. The critics, says Mr. Archer, are for the most part weary of dilating on Mr. Irving's defects; so they busy themselves in finding out the merits of each new impersonation. Not an unwholesome task, I fancy, even for the most acute critic. Mr. Irving is a sufficiently

great master of his craft to provide a whole generation of Archers with ideas. If half the pains expended to show that Mr. Irving's mannerisms are intolerable were spent on an inquiry into the real spirit of his art, there would be a good deal more profitable writing about the stage than we have yet been blessed with. There are plenty of people who can produce essays without end to prove that Mr. Irving is not a tragic actor, but a melodramatic actor of no very extraordinary quality. That the same man who has given us our most impressive melodrama should also shine in tragedy by means of a unique conjunction of emotional power and intellectual subtlety, is a fact they have never been able to grasp. "It is because Mr. Irving has the Shakespearian quality that he is tragic, comic, melodramatic, bold, refined, contemplative, or otherwise, just as the case requires. The variety of Shakespeare is a constant spur to this actor's various mind, and gives constant cues to his diverse powers." These words deserve to be remembered as an admirable index to Mr. Irving's art.

But if Mr. Irving is not so commonly assailed in print as he was wont to be, there is no abatement of detraction in society. You

cannot engage in conversation at any dinner-table without struggling in the turgid stream of the anti-Irving animus. Many tongues seem to have no occupation but that of wagging in his dispraise. When I was looking at Mr. Long's portrait of Mr. Irving as Hamlet one day at the Academy, there came a lady and gentleman through the adjacent doorway. "Irving as Hamlet," he remarked. "What absurd nonsense!" exclaimed his companion; and, without vouchsafing a glance at the picture, she literally rushed to the other end of the room. This rabid hostility to the actor has become a kind of disease to which the healing art of common sense and common justice is applied in vain. I know intelligent people to whom it is dangerous to talk of Mr. Irving's mannerisms. Their eyes roll wildly, and in all innocence of heart they tell the most remarkable fictions. They have brooded over some peculiarity of the actor till their disturbed fancy has made it a grotesquely impossible abortion which they gravely assure you is an indispensable part of his acting. There are many more who declare that they cannot endure him in tragedy, without reflecting that appreciation of tragedy is wholly beyond the scope of their sym-

pathies. This incessant — there is a stronger adjective in Shakespeare—iteration and exaggeration of Mr. Irving's mannerisms might have done him irreparable mischief at one time if his power over the popular imagination had not been so great. One might almost suppose that there never were mannered actors before Mr. Irving. How would John Philip Kemble fare at the hands of Mr. Archer if he could return to the stage to resume his disputes with the pit about the pronunciation of the English language? Kemble had a vocabulary of his own, and for the most peculiar words it was the nightly recreation of the pit to suggest the ordinary equivalents. When Kemble was not in the humour for the fray, he would disappoint his tormentors by leaving out a word for which they were lying in wait, and substituting another. This story has probably been very much embellished in its transit from Kemble's day; and stories which are told of Mr. Irving's mannerisms now, though in all conscience they are sufficiently absurd already, will doubtless be handed down to posterity in an even more fabulous form. It may even happen that these legends of Mr. Irving will strike scientific minds in remote ages, still in the womb of time, as so extraordinary

that the actor will be scheduled amongst the solar myths.

The reaction against all this fantastic misrepresentation has done not a little to swell Mr. Irving's popularity. A keen and highly educated Scotchman, who had never seen the actor before, went to witness his Hamlet. The new critic's mind was full of that appalling mannerism of which he had heard so much. "I looked and watched, and watched and looked," said he, "but I could not see it." No doubt it was there; but its relative proportion in a brilliant, subtle, and impassioned performance was so slight that it was imperceptible to a man who was enthralled by the actor's genius. There are people who count the times that Mr. Irving puts his hand to his head, just as there are people who, when examining a fine picture, find too much paint in a particular spot. The artist has no inspiration for them, because they have none for themselves. But, as a rule, it will be found that they have much more to say in detraction than the mass of the artist's admirers have to say in praise. The beauties of a great work of art are not realised in language by all who feel them. "There is always something new to be struck with in this

great actor's representations," wrote a penetrating critic of Mr. Irving's Shylock. "Have we ever noticed before the involuntary clenching of the hand, as if round the haft of a knife, when Shylock learns from Tubal, and every time Tubal mentions to him, in the midst of his trouble about Jessica, the calamity which threatens or promises to place Antonio at his mercy? Have we ever noted the solemn, slow striking of the breast at the sad words, 'The curse never fell upon our nation till now,' and then again, after deep thought, at the words, 'I never felt it till now'? Have we ever done justice to the wonderful, deliberate, and detailed elaboration of this Tubal scene, fraught though it be with the most consuming passion? Have we remarked, for instance, the magnificent point made where, upon hearing of Antonio's misfortune, Shylock utters the first 'I thank God' in wild, savage rage, but, after a scarcely perceptible check, pronounces the second 'I thank God' with uplifted hands, in lofty accents of religious doom? It is only necessary to remember to be prompted to multiply such noble examples of Irving's thrilling interpretation. The grave firmness and sardonic quality of the opening of the trial scene; the expressive tapping

action of the crescent-knife-point upon the bag of ducats offered in settlement: and then, when the tables turn, the haggard waning of the fanatic's confidence and satisfaction, unaccompanied by any loss of dignity, and culminating in a splendid exit, tottering, yet proud—these are all triumphs of the actor's art which must be remembered as long as such achievements can be borne in recollection."

Yes; many of us have observed all these things; but we have not always catalogued them, as Mr. Irving's detractors catalogue his peculiarities of gait and intonation, any more than we have noted down in black and white the varied excellences of our dearest friends. Nevertheless, there is a compact impression of power made by Mr. Irving's acting on our minds; and by degrees each vivid detail of his art grows in our vision to its full proportions. It is this experience which does much more to make the actor's fame than the barren routine of shallow censure does to mar it.

One thing at least in Mr. Irving's career is indisputable. He has had no guide but his own insight. Macready had the advantage of studying great models, and of observing how the traditions embodied by the eminent actors of his

own day were made instinct with original power. Mr. Irving has had no models. Another important difference between this actor and the elder tragedians is that the latter had a probation in the provinces. Kemble and Edmund Kean, for example, had worn the buskin for years when they displayed the fruits of study before a London audience. On the other hand, all Mr. Irving's tragic characters, Hamlet excepted—and in this connection the performance at Manchester in 1865 cannot count for much—have been first played in London. Without the invaluable experience derived from a long course of training in the highest range of the drama, Mr. Irving has set his stamp on some of the greatest tragic creations. "Very true," says Mr. Archer, "but then you have made him a law unto himself. He is judged by his own standard, because we have no other." When Mr. Booth played at the Lyceum there was ample opportunity to compare two very notable standards of acting; and whether the experienced judgment inclined to the elder or the younger tragedian, it could not be denied that the striking illumination of the play was due to an exceptional combination of originality and finished art.

There is no need to hanker after comparisons

in order to determine whether Mr. Irving has enlarged our conceptions of tragedy. No form of human effort excites more diversity of opinion than acting, and there is no more hopeless task than that of arguing with the veteran playgoer, who is astonished that any person of taste should see anything to admire in the drama of to-day; who will not admit that there has been any acting since the retirement of Macready and Helen Faucit; who says that declamation is a lost art, that our actors can neither speak nor walk, that our dramatic triumphs owe everything to the scene painter, and that a mechanical thing called melodrama, and an imbecile thing called modern comedy, have killed the truly elevating elements of dramatic literature which descended to us from Elizabeth. There never was a generation in which the same terrible lament was not uttered by playgoers whose affections clung to the stage-fashions of an earlier period. I know of no more impossible quest than that for the really palmy days of the British drama. If you look for them in Macready's time, you learn that they were in Edmund Kean's. If you read what the critics said of Kean, you find that very sapient judges held that there had been

no true glory for the stage since Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble were at their zenith. You conscientiously wade through all that was ever written of those great artists only to be convinced that Garrick's reign was the golden age. You take a pretty long breath and start afresh; but, alas! it appears that, great actor and indefatigable manager as Garrick was, he played some horrible pranks with Shakespeare; re-wrote a great part of "Romeo and Juliet;" rescued "Hamlet" from "the rubbish of the fifth act;" supplemented the legitimate drama with harlequins and opera dancers, and produced five act plays of such phenomenal dulness that to see them now ranged on a dusty bookshelf is to feel as if you had swallowed forty fogs. From Garrick you pass forward, or rather backward, to Betterton. Betterton was a great light in the dramatic world, but you make the mournful discovery that he was responsible for the earliest decoration of the English stage with scenic accessories. This, said some of his contemporaries, was the beginning of a corruption which could lead only to perdition. Before Betterton's day scenery consisted of the highly primitive decorations which had come down from Shakespeare. A pair of

linsy-woolsy curtains, or a bit of old tapestry covered with horrible figures "that would fright an audience," as a sprightly commentator remarked, did duty for palaces, landscapes, and sea views. To banish linsy-woolsy was clearly a sacrilegious act. It was a hideous outrage upon the severe virtue which had distinguished Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Your only resource now is to rush into their blissful period, and seek a refreshing calm in the contemplation of the perfect art and the noble simplicity which characterised Shakespeare's management of the Globe. If only our degenerate public could have seen Burbidge, the first Hamlet, who received his inspiration from the mighty poet himself, and who played Shylock with a red wig and a false nose! Here was the fountain head of the great Elizabethan stage. Our materials for a judgment of its capacity are somewhat scanty; yet we should readily imagine how grandly impressive must have been Hamlet's vigil on the platform at Elsinore, with a piece of board for the battlements; how remarkably supernatural the ghost as he stalked from behind the linsy-woolsy; how sweetly feminine the Ophelia represented by a boy of sixteen! But alack, the incurable scepticism

which is the bane of this generation pursues us even here! Why should we suppose that Burbidge's Hamlet was more remarkable than the great Hamlets of our time? The first embodiment of so complex and subtle a personality naturally seemed wonderful to Burbidge's contemporaries; but should we rate it very highly if we could see it now? In a word, has the art of acting made no progress in the course of some three hundred and eighty years, or has the whole system of dramatic representation developed with successive ages? It might as well be contended that because Garrick played Macbeth in silk stockings and a bag wig, Mr. Irving should represent the same character in a frock coat and a silk hat.

It is Mr. Irving's highest title to honour that he has taught the intelligent playgoer never to despair of the English stage. If it ever was a paradox that the poetic drama, and the drama of wholesome realism, may hold their own against the forces of frivolity and thinly veiled vice, the time now gives it proof. When Shakespeare spelt bankruptcy in London, it was because there was no man of brains and culture who could set forth the poet's conceptions with a real and

vigorous sense of their vitality. It is one thing to produce a Shakespearian play with lavish magnificence, but with no independent grasp of the author's purpose, and quite another to make it live upon the stage. That is what Henry Irving has done to-day, and that is why his memory, quite apart from his personal achievements as an actor, will be held in honour and grateful remembrance by all who follow in his footsteps. He is one of the few men of rare capacity and force of character who educate their public, and it is from the educational standpoint that it would be well if more of us were to view the stage. Every art is worthy of study, even though its effects afford but a temporary pleasure to a jaded mind. To the uneducated eye the masses of colour in a picture gallery may give much delight, but what is that to enjoyment which springs from a knowledge of all the subtle harmonies of painting? There is no more difficult or fascinating art than that of acting. There is no world which employs so many faculties as the world behind the scenes. The effects which seem so simple and spontaneous, the incidents which are so picturesque and natural, the ease of movement, the grace of combination, the harmony of

colour—all these are the product of a complex organisation which is brought to perfection by unremitting study, skill, and labour. But it is from the public that the motive power of this elaborate machinery is derived, and in proportion as the public displays an intelligent interest in the higher drama, the actor and his coadjutors are stimulated to do their most brilliant work. If a tithe of the good people who denounce the stage would apply themselves to a rational study of its elements, they would do a great deal more for the moral tone of an indispensable art than they can accomplish by pious vituperation. If social loungers, whose interest in a theatre is mainly occupied with scandalous stories of the members of the dramatic profession, would think more of the characters represented on the stage, and less of the private lives of the artists who represent them, they would do something to justify their existence. Yet Mr. Irving's career has shown most signally, that in an age when English society is supposed to have lost its faith in ideals, it is possible for an English actor to fulfil with prosperity and renown the noblest functions of his calling. To Mr. Irving's influence must be assigned much of the credit for the growth of

dramatic intelligence in England. Never were there so many highly trained companies in the London theatres. Never was there such a prospect of unbounded success for a genuinely good play. And as the ridiculous is sometimes as striking an illustration as the sublime, I may cite as a remarkable concession to educated opinion the virtuous exploit of a London manager, who opened his theatre for a purely spectacular entertainment with the noble announcement that his productions would be "diverting, but not irreverent; grand, but not gaudy; mirthful, but not meretricious; decorous, but never depressing."

CHAPTER XI.

ESSAYS AND ADDRESSES.

IT would be a grave oversight on the part of any biographer of Mr. Irving if no account were taken of the actor's efforts, both by voice and pen, to uphold the moral dignity and intellectual character of his profession. His first essay of this kind was a paper read before the Church of England Temperance Society, on March 31, 1876. An actor addressing an assembly of clergymen might have been too acutely conscious of the novelty of his position to speak his mind freely. But Mr. Irving improved the occasion without hesitation. He pointed out to his auditors how needful it was that they should make themselves acquainted with the real character of the theatre, instead of accepting unfavourable reports which had long

ceased to be true. The abominations which used to infest the theatre had disappeared. Those abominations, it is often alleged, Mr. Macready tried, in vain, to repress; he certainly struggled hard to do so, but whether he failed or not it is certain that those abominations have been now absolutely swept away, and that the audience portion of any theatre is as completely free from immoral, or even indecorous associations, as Exeter Hall during the performance of the "Elijah." But this is not known, even now, to thousands of religious people. It is a curious circumstance, for instance—and I speak frankly in my endeavour to bring out the truth—that many good people, who would think it dangerous to go to a theatre to see plays, rush to see them represented at the Crystal Palace, or attend with the greatest ease of mind a promenade concert, the audience at which really is thickly contaminated with the evil which has entirely disappeared from our theatres—that evil being rendered all the more harmful because the whole assembly is constantly perambulating the floor of the opera house.

Mr. Irving then drew in moderate language a picture of the actual condition of the stage, and

made a good point by asking his audience whether a sound dramatic entertainment was not better than the attractions of the tap-room.

"I have thought it best—as well as I could—to dwell on the proved attractiveness and the demonstrably good influence of dramatic amusements, rather than on the evils of those vicious indulgences which it is the object of a religious temperance movement to overcome, because I know more of the former aspect of the subject than of the latter, and because I am anxious to offer, as my cordial contribution to your good work, a suggestion that the clergy, and all who co-operate with them, should use their influence for the purification, rather than the suppression or tabooing, of the stage. The worst performances presented in our theatres cannot be so evil as the spending of a corresponding period of time in a gin-palace or a pot-house. Drinking by the hour, as practised in the evenings by too many of our working men, is not, be it remembered, mere silent drinking—it is not mere physical indulgence or degradation. It takes place in good fellowship. It is accompanied by conversation and merriment. Such conversation! and such merriment! Where drink is and the excitement that comes of it—with

no restraining opinion or usage to curb the tongue —there the talk will be obscene, the whole atmosphere degrading.

"Now, it may be possible for such habits to co-exist, to a certain extent, with theatrical tastes. Men still go to the theatre as an amusement, not as an exercise of mental improvement. And it is well they so regard it, or they would not go at all; but it is impossible to imagine that drink can have the same fascination for a man who has, and indulges, theatrical tastes, as for one who finds in the public-house his only joy.

"Make the theatre respected by openly recognising its services. Make it more respectable by teaching the working and lower middle classes to watch for good or even creditable plays, and to patronise them when presented. Let members of religious congregations know that there is no harm, but rather good, in entering into ordinary amusements, so far as they are decorous. Use the pulpit, the press, and the platform to denounce, not the stage, but certain evils that find allowance on it. . . . Gentlemen, change your attitude towards the stage, and, believe me, the stage will co-operate with you in your work of faith and labour of love."

That this sensible and temperate appeal was not without effect, the support accorded to Mr. Irving by the clergy has borne ample evidence. It is a time-honoured joke, that the manager of a Scotch theatre, peeping at the house before the rising of the curtain on the first night of Mr. Irving's engagement, was so astonished to see parsons in the stalls, that he thought the actor must be about to open a prayer-meeting. Less familiar, perhaps, is the story told of Edwin Booth's father who went down to New Orleans as his habit was, on the chance of finding an engagement. The managers were always glad to have him, but on this occasion they could not meet his wishes. "Very sorry, Mr. Booth," said one, "but I have an opera company here, and I cannot make room for you." Nothing disconcerted, the actor applied to the manager of a French theatre, for he could play in French as well as in English. But here too ill-fortune attended him. "Never mind," he said, when the manager was profuse with his apologies, "I'll do something before I leave the town." And, sure enough, he preached a sermon with the utmost zeal to an attentive congregation. Perhaps the Scotch manager thought for the

moment that Mr. Irving was going to rival this achievement.

It is not the least of Mr. Irving's claims to distinction that the recognition of the drama as an educational influence, by many who had formerly regarded it with indifference, if not with distaste, is mainly due to his exertions. Before he became famous, too much of the play-going world in London was given up to entertainments which Tennyson aptly described in his farewell address to Macready—

"And those gilt-gauds men-children swarm to see."

But thoughtful men began to perceive that Mr. Irving's genius and ambition were likely to rescue the higher drama from the reproach of having "flickered down to brainless pantomime." No better proof of this wholesome change of feeling could have been afforded than the election of Mr. Irving as President of the Perry Barr Institute, near Birmingham, in 1878. Perry Barr is an off-shoot of the Midland Institute, which has done so much for the cultivation of the masses. Nor did this remarkable compliment to Mr. Irving stop here; for in August of the same year he was invited to lay the foundation stone of another

institution of the same class at Harborne. On this occasion he said :

"They who were so closely affiliated to the great centre (the Midland Institute) might well feel proud of their association with such an important movement. It was not for him to speak in detail of the course of study to be pursued at their institute — to recommend one branch of study in preference to another; but speaking as an actor—and they would see that it was as difficult for player as for professor to forget his calling for five minutes—he was glad to know that they would not leave out of their culture that legitimate development of the imagination without which life was but a dry routine. If they did not idealise something, this was a painfully prosaic world. Poetry and fiction did much to lighten their care, and for many people the drama did more, for it sometimes helped many—especially the poor, the uncultured, and unlettered—to a right appreciation of life. He did not argue—and he was sure they did not expect him to argue—whether dramatic exposition had or had not a beneficial influence in the main upon society. If they differed on that point he should not have been there, and he should not have had the satis-

faction of having been chosen by his friends at Perry Barr as the representative of the association of dramatic art with the educational work. With those people who maintained that there was a something radically vicious in the whole theory and principle of the stage—well, they must live as comfortably as they could. Such persons would like to rob actors of their audiences, but actors did not bear them any malice for that. What sensible men had to do was not to make futile attempts to destroy an institution which was bound up with some of the best instincts of human nature, but to strive to remove its abuses and elevate its tone. He was sure the members of that Institute would never forget what they owed, and what the world owed, to that great supreme genius who had shed immortal lustre on the dramatic literature of the country. Far above the merits of any individual actor, there was this consideration: that if he aimed at the highest standard of his profession, he helped thousands to a fellowship, sympathy, and intelligence with the great mind which gave to the drama its noblest form. But some people said, 'Oh, we think Shakespeare very admirable, and if you played nothing but his works at every theatre we should be delighted to support you.' It

seemed to him that one might almost as well say, 'If every book of poetry I take up has not the lofty inspiration of Milton, I must refuse to support poetry.' But it was impossible for Shakespeare to be played in every theatre, for many obvious reasons. In dramatic representation, as in everything else, there must be a variety of tastes. Art had many phases, and every one of them contained something admirable and excellent in its way. Certainly, the higher the general level of their culture, the more exalted would be their taste; and he felt assured that the efforts of the members of that Institute and kindred institutes would be directed to foster what was worthiest in dramatic art."

But Mr. Irving's most forcible vindication of the stage was his address to the members of the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution on November 1, 1881. The occasion might well have made him prouder than ever of the profession which was honoured in his person by an assembly representing the highest culture of Scotland. Mr. Irving evidently felt that this was a time, not for apology, but for a striking statement of the highest claims of his art to the esteem of educated men. He began by commenting in severe terms on

the theory that the highest dramatic literature was unsuited to the theatre.

"To boast of being able to appreciate Shakespeare more in reading him than in seeing him acted used to be a common method of affecting special intellectuality. I hope this delusion —a gross and pitiful one with the most of us —has almost died out. It certainly conferred a very cheap badge of superiority on those who entertained it. It seemed to each of them an inexpensive opportunity of worshipping himself on a pedestal. But what did it amount to? It was little more than a conceited and feather-headed assumption that an unprepared reader, whose mind is usually full of far other things, will see on the instant all that has been developed in hundreds of years by the members of a studious and enthusiastic profession. My own conviction is, that there are few characters or passages of our great dramatists which will not repay original study. But at least we must recognise the vast advantages with which a practised actor, impregnated by the associations of his life, and by study—with all the practical and critical skill of his profession up to the date at which he appears, whether he adopts or rejects

tradition—addresses himself to the interpretation of any great character, even if he have no originality whatever. There is something still more than this, however, in acting. Every one who has the smallest histrionic gift has a natural dramatic faculty; so that as soon as he knows the author's text, and obtains self-possession, and feels at home in a part without being too familiar with it, the mere automatic action of rehearsing and playing it at once begins to place the author in new lights, and to give the personage being played an individuality partly independent of, and yet consistent with, and rendering more powerfully visible, the dramatist's conception. It is the vast power a good actor has in this way which has led the French to speak of creating a part when they mean its being first played; and French authors are so conscious of the extent and value of this co-operation of actors with them that they have never objected to the phrase, but, on the contrary, are uniformly lavish in their homage to the artists who have created on the boards the parts which they themselves have created on paper. I must add, as an additional reason for valuing the theatre, that while there is only one Shakespeare, and while there are com-

paratively few dramatists who are sufficiently classic to be read with close attention, there is a great deal of average dramatic work excellently suited for representation. From this the public derive pleasure. From this they receive — as from fiction in literature—a great deal of instruction and mental stimulus; some worldly, some social, some cynical, some merely humorous and witty, but a great deal of it, though its literary merit is secondary, well qualified to bring out all that is most fruitful of good in common sympathies. Now, it is plain that if, because Shakespeare is good reading, people were to give the cold shoulder to the theatre, the world would lose all the vast advantage which comes to it through the dramatic faculty in forms not rising to essentially literary excellence."

Mr. Irving then pointed out that the stage, which men like John Angell James used to denounce fifty years ago, had been reformed, and that nothing was more absurd than the idea that to avoid the theatre was to avoid moral contamination.

"There are people now who think that they can keep their children, and that those children will keep themselves in after life, in cotton

wool, so as to avoid all temptation of body and mind, and be saved nine-tenths of the responsibility of self-control. All this is mere fantasy. You must be in the world, though you need not be of it; and the best way to make the world a better community to be in, and not so bad a place to be of, is not to shun, but to bring public opinion to bear upon its pursuits and its relaxations. Depend upon two things—that the theatre, as a whole, is never below the average moral sense of the time; and that the inevitable demand for an admixture, at least, of wholesome sentiment in every sort of dramatic production brings the ruling tone of the theatre, whatever drawbacks may exist, up to the highest level at which the general morality of the time can truly be registered. We may be encouraged by the reflection that this is truer than ever it was before, owing to the greater spread of education, the increased community of taste between classes, and the almost absolute divorce of the stage from mere wealth and aristocracy. Wealth and aristocracy come around the stage in abundance, and are welcome, as in the time of Elizabeth; but the stage is no longer a mere appendage of court-life, no longer a mere mirror of patrician vice hanging

at the girdle of fashionable profligacy, as it was in the days of Congreve and Wycherley. It is now the property of the educated people. It has to satisfy them or pine in neglect. And the better their demands, the better will be the supply with which the drama will respond. This being not only so, but seen to be so, the stage is no longer proscribed. It is no longer under a ban. Its members are no longer pariahs in society. They live and bear their social part like others—as decorously observant of all that makes for the sweet sanctities of life—as gracefully cognisant of its amenities—as readily recognised and welcomed as the members of any other profession. Am I not here your grateful guest opening the session of this philosophical and historic institution?—I who am simply an actor, an interpreter, with such gifts as I have and such thought as I can bestow, of stage plays. And am I not received here with perfect cordiality on an equality, not hungrily bowing and smirking for patronage, but interchanging ideas which I am glad to express, and which you listen to as thoughtfully and as kindly as you would to those of any other student, any other man who had won his way into such prominence as to come within the ken of a distin-

guished institution such as that which I have the honour to address? I do not mince the matter as to my personal position here, because I feel it is a representative one, and marks an epoch in the estimation in which the art I love is held by the British public. You have had many distinguished men here, and their themes have often been noble, but with which of those themes has not my art immemorial and perpetual associations? Is it not for ever identified with the noblest instincts and occupations of the human mind? If I think of poetry, must I not remember how to the measure of its lofty music the theatre has in almost all ages set the grandest of dramatic conceptions? If I think of literature, must I not recall that of all the amusements by which men in various states of society have solaced their leisure and refreshed their energies, the acting of plays is the one that has never yet, even for a day, been divorced from literary taste and skill? If I meditate on patriotism, can I but reflect how grandly the boards have been trod by personifications of heroic love of country? There is no subject of human thought that by common consent is deemed ennobling that has not ere now, and from period to period, been illustrated in the bright

vesture, and received expression from the glowing language of theatrical representation. And surely it is fit that, remembering what the stage has been and must be, I should acknowledge eagerly and gladly that, with few exceptions, the public no longer debar themselves from the profitable pleasures of the theatre, and no longer brand with any social stigma the professors of the histrionic art. Talking to a very eminent bishop one day, I said to him, 'Now, my lord, why is it, with your love and knowledge of the drama, with your deep interest in the stage and all its belongings, and your wide sympathy with all that ennobles and refines our natures—why is it that you never go to the theatre?' 'Well, my dear Irving,' said he, 'I'll tell you. I'm afraid of the *Rock* and the *Record*.' I hope soon we shall relieve even the most timid bishop—and my right reverend friend is not the most timid—of all fears and tremors whatever that can prevent even ministers of religion from recognising the wisdom of the change of view which has come over even the most fastidious public opinion on this question."

Who was the prelate deterred by the *Rock* and *Record*—those watchdogs of Puritanic prejudice—

from openly visiting the theatre, it is bootless to inquire, though it may be hoped that he has since found the nerve to brave their ignoble rage.

There was much talk at this time of a school for actors, and though Mr. Irving has since taken a prominent part in the establishment of the School of Dramatic Art which promises to be a most useful institution, he cherished that dread which English actors have always felt, and with no small reason, of the formalism of a conservatoire.

"Every actor in full employment gets plenty of schooling, for the best schooling is practice, and there is no school so good as a well-conducted playhouse. The truth is that the cardinal secrets of success in acting are found within, while practice is the surest way of fertilising these germs. To efficiency in the art of acting there should come a congregation of fine qualities. There should be considerable, though not necessarily, systematic culture. There should be delicate instincts of taste cultivated, consciously or unconsciously, to a degree of extreme and subtle nicety. There should be a power, at once refined and strong, of both perceiving and expressing to others the significance of language, so that neither shades nor masses of meaning, so to speak, may be either

lost or exaggerated. Above all, there should be a sincere and abounding sympathy with all that is good, and great, and inspiring. That sympathy, most certainly, must be under the control and manipulation of art, but it must be none the less real and generous, and the artist who is a mere artist will stop short of the highest moral effects of his craft. Little of this can be got in a mere training school, but all of it will come forth more or less fully armed from the actor's brain in the process of learning his art by practice. For the way to learn to do a thing is to do it; and in learning to act by acting, though there is plenty of incidental hard drill and hard work, there is nothing commonplace or unfruitful."

This is all very true; but it scarcely proves the inutility of a training school, in which a pupil may learn the technicalities of his craft. Mr. Irving must have been much indebted in his early youth to the lessons he received from Mr. Hoskins; and why should not a dramatic apprentice acquire as useful knowledge in a dramatic school?

But the actor was on surer ground when he assailed the dramatic "reformers." An association had been formed not long before for the purpose of purifying plays—and it was solemnly

agreed that farces and dramas taken from the French must be strenuously discountenanced. So earnest were the organisers of this wonderful scheme, that they even proposed to take a theatre in which nothing should be permitted that could bring a blush to the cheek of "the young person." Fortunately for their pockets this project was not put into execution. Perhaps Mr. Irving's advice acted as a timely deterrent, though it was more of a castigation than an admonition.

"The dramatic reformers are very well-meaning people. They show great enthusiasm. They are new converts to the theatre, most of them, and they have the zeal of converts. But it is scarcely according to knowledge. These ladies and gentlemen have not studied the conditions of theatrical enterprise. . . . They do not know what to ban or to bless. If they had their way, as of course they cannot, they would license, with many flourishes and much self-laudation, a number of pieces which would be hopelessly condemned on the first hearing, and they would lay an embargo for very insufficient reasons on many plays well entitled to success. It is not in this direction that we must look for any improvement that is needed in the purveying of material for the stage. Be-

lieve me, the right direction is public criticism and public discrimination. I say so because, beyond question, the public will have what they want. So far from managers in their discretion, or at their pleasure, forcing on the public either very good or very bad dramatic material, it is an utter delusion. They have no such power. If they had the will they could only force any particular sort of entertainment just as long as they had capital to expend without any return. But they really have not the will. They follow the public taste with the greatest keenness. If the people want Shakespeare—as I am happy to say they do, at least at one theatre in London, and at all the great theatres out of London, to an extent, as proved by financial receipts entirely unprecedented in the history of the stage—then they get Shakespeare. If they want our modern dramatists—Albery, Boucicault, Byron, Burnand, Gilbert, or Wills—these they have. If they want Robertson, Robertson is there for them. If they desire opera-bouffe, depend upon it they will have it, and have it they do. What then do I infer? Simply this: that those who prefer the higher drama—in the representation of which my heart's best interests are centred—instead of querulously animadverting

on managers who give them something different, should, as Lord Beaconsfield said, 'make themselves into a majority.' If they do so, the higher drama will be produced. But if we really understand the value of the drama, we shall not be too rigid in our exactions. The drama is the art of human nature in picturesque or characteristic action. Let us be liberal in our enjoyment of it. Tragedy, comedy, historical pastoral, pastoral comical—remember the large-minded list of the greatest-minded poet—all are good, if wholesome, —and will be wholesome if the public continue to take the healthy interest in theatres which they are now taking. The worst times for the stage have been those when playgoing was left pretty much to a loose society, such as is sketched in the Restoration dramatists. If the good people continue to come to the theatre in increasing crowds, the stage, without losing any of its brightness, will soon be good enough, if it is not as yet, to satisfy the best of them."

The services of the stage to thought and culture have probably never been more convincingly asserted than in the following passage:

"Let me insist on the intellectual and moral use, alike to the most and least cultivated of us,

of this art 'most beautiful, most difficult, most rare,' which I stand here to-day, not to apologise for, but to establish, in the high place to which it is entitled among the arts and among the ameliorating influences of life. Grant that any of us understand a dramatist better for seeing him acted, and it follows, first, that all of us will be most indebted to the stage at the point where the higher and more ethereal faculties are liable in reading to failure and exhaustion, that is, stage-playing will be of most use to us where the mind requires help and inspiration to grasp and revel in lofty moral or imaginative conceptions, or where it needs aid and sharpening to appreciate and follow the niceties of repartee, or the delicacies of comic fancy. Secondly, it follows that if this is so with the intellectual few, it must be infinitely more so with the unimaginative many of all ranks. They are not inaccessible to passion and poetry and refinement, but their minds do not go forth, as it were, to seek these joys; and even if they read works of poetic and dramatic fancy, which they rarely do, they would miss them on the printed page. To them, therefore, with the exception of a few startling incidents of real life, the theatre is the only channel through which are ever brought the

great sympathies of the world of thought beyond their immediate ken. And thirdly, it follows from all this that the stage is, intellectually and morally, to all who have recourse to it, the source of some of the finest and best influences of which they are respectively susceptible. To the thoughtful and reading man it brings the life, the fire, the colour, the vivid instinct which are beyond the reach of study. To the common indifferent man, immersed as a rule in the business and socialities of daily life, it brings visions of glory and adventure, of emotion and of broad human interest. It gives him glimpses of the heights and depths of character and experience, setting him thinking and wondering even in the midst of amusement. To the most torpid and unobservant it exhibits the humorous in life and the sparkle and finesse of language, which in dull ordinary existence is shut out of knowledge or omitted from particular notice. To all it uncurtains a world, not that in which they live and yet not other than it—a world in which interest is heightened and yet the conditions of truth are observed, in which the capabilities of men and women are seen developed without losing their consistency to nature, and developed with a curious and wholesome fidelity

to simple and universal instincts of clear right and wrong."

Mr. Irving's anxiety not to overstate his case was shown by his allusion to Shakespeare's misgivings about the theatre.

"There never was a time when the stage had not conspicuous faults. There never was a time when these were not freely admitted by those most concerned for the maintenance of the stage at its best. In Shakespeare, whenever the subject of the theatre is approached, we perceive signs that that great spirit, though it had a practical and business-like vein, and essayed no impossible enterprises, groaned under the necessities or the demands of a public which desired frivolities and deformities which jarred upon the poet-manager's feelings. As we descend the course of time we find that each generation looked back to a supposed previous period when taste ranged higher, and when the inferior and offensive peculiarities of the existing stage were unknown. Yet from most of these generations we inherit works as well as traditions and biographical recollections which the world will never let die. The truth is that the immortal part of the stage is its nobler part.

Ignoble accidents and interludes come and go, but this lasts on for ever. It lives, like the human soul, in the body of humanity—associated with much that is inferior, and hampered by many hindrances—but it never sinks into nothingness, and never fails to find new and noble work in creations of permanent and memorable excellence. Heaven forbid that I should seem to cover, even with a counterpane of courtesy, exhibitions of deliberate immorality. Happily this sort of thing is not common, and although it has hardly been practised by any one who, without a strain of meaning, can be associated with the profession of acting, yet public censure, not active enough to repress the evil, is ever ready to pass a sweeping condemnation on the stage which harbours it."

Then comes a remarkable panegyric of Shakespeare which should be remembered by those who have accused Mr. Irving of exalting the player at the expense of the play.

"Only the theatre can realise to us in a lifelike way what Shakespeare was to his own time. And it is indeed a noble destiny for the theatre to vindicate in these later days the greatness which sometimes it has seemed to vulgarise. It has been too much the custom to talk of Shakespeare

as Nature's child—as the lad who held horses for people who came to the play—as a sort of chance phenomenon who wrote these plays by accident and unrecognised. How supremely ridiculous! How utterly irreconcilable with the grand dimensions of the man! How absurdly dishonouring to the great age of which he was, and was known to be, the glory! The noblest literary man of all time—the finest and yet most prolific writer—the greatest student of man, and the greatest master of man's highest gifts of language—surely it is treason to humanity to speak of such a one as in any sense a commonplace being! Imagine him rather, as he must have been, the most notable courtier of the Court—the most perfect gentleman who stood in the Elizabethan throng—the man in whose presence divines would falter and hesitate lest their knowledge of the Book should seem poor by the side of his, and at whom even queenly royalty would look askance, with an oppressive sense that here was one to whose omnipotent and true imagination the hearts of kings and queens and peoples had always been an open page! The thought of such a man is an incomparable inheritance for any nation, and such a man was the actor—Shakespeare. Such is our birthright and

yours. Such the succession in which it is ours to labour and yours to enjoy. For Shakespeare belongs to the stage for ever, and his glories must always inalienably belong to it. For myself, it kindles my heart with proud delight to think that I have stood to-day before this intellectual audience—known for its discrimination throughout all English-speaking lands—a welcome and honoured guest, because I stand here for justice to the art to which I am devoted—because I stand here in thankfulness for the justice which has begun to be so abundantly rendered to it. If it is metaphorically the destiny of humanity, it is literally the experience of an actor, that one man in his time plays many parts. A player of any standing must at various times have sounded the gamut of human sensibility from the lowest note to the top of its compass. He must have banqueted often on curious food for thought as he meditated on the subtle relations created between himself and his audiences, as they have watched in his impersonations the shifting tariff—the ever gliding, delicately graduated sliding-scale of dramatic right and wrong. He may have gloated, if he be a cynic, over the depths of ghastly horror, or the vagaries of moral puddle through which it may have been

his duty to plash. But if he be an honest man, he will acknowledge that scarcely ever has either dramatist or management wilfully biassed the effect of stage representation in favour of evil, and of his audiences he will boast that never has their mind been doubtful—never has their true perception of the generous and just been known to fail, or even to be slow. How noble the privilege to work upon these finer—these finest—feelings of universal humanity! How engrossing the fascination of those thousands of steady eyes, and sound sympathies, and beating hearts which an actor confronts, with the confidence of friendship and co-operation, as he steps upon the stage to work out in action his long pent comprehension of a noble masterpiece! How rapturous the satisfaction of abandoning himself, in such a presence and with such sympathisers, to his author's grandest flights of thought and noblest bursts of emotional inspiration! And how perpetually sustaining the knowledge that whatever may be the vicissitudes and even the degradations of the stage, it must and will depend for its constant hold on the affection and attention of mankind upon its loftier work; upon its more penetrating passion; upon its themes which most deeply

search out the strong affections and high hopes of men and women; upon its fit and kindling illustration of great and vivid lives which either have been lived in noble fact or have deserved to endure immortally in the popular belief and admiration which they have secured!

'For our eyes to see!
Sons of wisdom, song, and power,
Giving earth her richest dower,
And making nations free—
A glorious company!

'Call them from the dead
For our eyes to see!
Forms of beauty, love, and grace,
"Sunshine in the shady place,"
That made it life to be—
A blessed company!'"

It would have been surprising if this eloquent plea for the stage had passed unchallenged. To disparage the theatre is the favourite occupation of some writers who affect a belief that real dramatic literature is best appreciated by the student in the serene seclusion of his closet, undisturbed by the garish lights and the inadequate mechanism of the play-house. Mr. Irving's onslaught on this theory evoked some replies, in which it was not very candidly assumed that the

actor had claimed infallibility for the stage, and set Shakespeare's interpreters above Shakespeare himself. Mr. Irving wrote an article which was virtually a rejoinder, and which appeared in *Good Words* for January, 1883. There must have been much upturning of the eyes amongst the "unco' guid" when they found an essay by an actor in a magazine edited by Dr. Norman Macleod. It would be interesting to know whether Dr. Macleod lost any subscribers by this editorial experiment, and whether, like a clergyman in Edinburgh who preached about the drama during Mr. Irving's last visit, he was favoured with anonymous warnings of his fate when he should stand before "the great white throne."

Mr. Irving's article was entitled "Shakespeare on the Stage and in the Study." With a touch of bitterness he reviewed the variations and inconsistencies of religious sentiment with regard to the drama.

"At Ober-Ammergau to-day, many people who regard a theatre with misgiving, if not aversion, are profoundly moved by the story of the Divine Passion, unfolded, not by preachers, but trained artists. For the same class, the dramatisation of the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' by Dr.

George Mac Donald and his clever family, is void of offence. Yet the actors who personified the creations of Æschylus and Sophocles would have been astonished could they have foreseen that their profession would be alternately patronised, petted, and preached at; outlawed in the land of Shakespeare; refused the rites of decent burial in the land of Molière; and not safe even now from misconstruction. Reflecting on the vicissitudes of his art, an actor might be tempted to the conclusion that holding the mirror up to Nature was the most thankless of occupations. He is repaid by the delight his craft affords to thousands, and by the appreciation it has won from some of the noblest of human intellects; but when a wave of prejudice, a little higher than usual, dashes in his face, he is distracted by the insoluble puzzle that a large section of the community still believes him to have some responsibility for the perpetuity of evil."

Mr. Irving then proceeded to combat the statement of an American professor to the effect that an actor's study is not how to think, but how to represent to the senses of an audience, and that acting is mere dramatisation to eye and ear, not to the mind. "The apt pupil," retorted Mr.

Irving, "may chance to learn quite as much in a single evening at the theatre as he will learn from a whole course of lectures. . . . He may have an admirable idea of 'Hamlet' in the abstract. Fully to comprehend the play as it is set before him, his mind should be saturated with all the lore of research and commentary. But Hamlet is flesh and blood, not a bundle of philosophies. The student may recognise all his ideas and more in the scene; but above all he will find what critical investigation cannot give him—the tones of a human voice vibrating with passion, tenderness, and mockery, together with the subtle play of look and gesture which impart form and colour to the thought. The American writer I have quoted suggests that Hamlet's address to the players proves that the poet held their craft in light esteem. I should have thought that 'to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure' was a noble function for any art. . . . Seeing that Shakespeare was himself an actor, that his genius was distinctly inspired by the stage, that every play abounds with evidence of what he owed to his knowledge of stage effect, it is not surprising that he should pay so high a tribute to

the art which, if words have any meaning, he clearly recognises as the great interpreter of his works. None but an actor would have conceived and executed the marvellous climax of the play-scene in 'Hamlet.' Had Shakespeare attached slight importance to the acted drama he would never have put into Hamlet's brain the notable device which led to the confirmation of his uncle's guilt:

> 'I have heard
> That guilty creatures sitting at a play
> Have, by the very cunning of the scene,
> Been struck so to the soul, that presently
> They have proclaimed their malefactions.'

If the poet owed this idea to the stage, what must the interpreters of it owe to the stage? Is it possible that the student not gifted with phenomenal imagination can in his closet realise all the force of this episode as it is realised by the actor? . . . There are people who fancy they have more music in their souls than was ever translated into harmony by Beethoven or Mozart. There are others who think they could write poetry, paint pictures, in short do anything, if they only made the effort. To them what is accomplished by the practised actor seems easy and simple. But as it needs the skill of the musician to draw the full volume of

eloquence from the written score, so it needs the skill of the dramatic artist to develop the subtle harmonies of the poetic play. I challenge the acute student to ponder over Hamlet's renunciation of Ophelia—one of the most complex scenes in all Shakespeare—and say that he has learned more from his meditations than he could be taught by players whose intelligence is equal to his own."

When Mr. Irving came to discuss the soliloquies in Shakespeare, he was on ground peculiarly his own; for no actor of our day has ever been more successful in laying bare the innermost secrets of the mind.

"It is not only the stress and strain of emotion which in Shakespeare are most powerfully realised on the stage. The actor should also have a mastery of intellectual self-communion. The whole working of Hamlet's or Macbeth's mood may be laid bare in the soliloquies. To present the man thinking aloud is the most difficult achievement of our art. Here the actor who has no real grip of the complexities of the character, but merely recites the speeches with a certain grace and intelligence, will be untrue. The more intent he is upon the words and the less on the ideas that dictated them, the more likely is he to

lay himself open to the charge of mechanical interpretation. It is perfectly possible to express to an audience all the involutions of thought, the speculation, doubt, wavering, which reveal the meditative but irresolute mind. Hamlet's spirit may be read in his face, and as the varying shades of fancy pass and repass this mirror, they may yield more material to the studious playgoer than he is likely to get by the most diligent poring over the text. It is a commonplace that the face is sometimes a more exact indication of the thought than the most perfect utterance. An eloquent look, a speaking gesture, or a suggestive pause, may be worth an infinity of footnotes. One of the greatest charms to the spectator is to watch the by-play of the actor, to see the poison of Iago's devilry stealing into Othello's soul, to observe the gradations of passion, the transition of undoubting love into the slow agony of misgiving, and the frenzy of despair. How is the reader to realise in his mind's eye what is actually depicted on the actor's face? Can he 'in a fiction, in a dream of passion, force his soul so to his own conceit, that from her working' he can evolve all the features of a fine stage picture? see the great Cæsar, perturbed by presentiments of doom, or watch the

coming of the tragedy in the looks of Brutus, Cassius, and Casca?"

Most forcible of all was the evidence that Shakespeare had been made a reality to many students by the latest dramatic exposition of his plays.

"It would surprise the misbeliever in the potency of Shakespeare on the stage to know how many University students, not content with reading the poet, are ambitious to embody his creations. It is one of the most encouraging signs of the future of dramatic art, that every year finds an increasing number of educated men and women, willing to brave all the drudgery of an arduous calling, in the hope of rising some day to its highest walk. They are inspired not by the mere enthusiasm of inexperience, but by the firm conviction that there is always a great and appreciative public for the artists who have caught even something of the spirit of our dramatic ideals. This was some time a paradox, but now the time gives it proof. Thousands who flock to-day to see a Shakespeare representation, which is the product of much reverent study of the poet, are not content to regard it as a scenic exhibition. Without it Shakespeare might have been for many of them a sealed book;

but many more have been impelled by the vivid realism of the stage to renew studies which other occupations or lack of leisure have arrested. The great sale of the acting edition of a Shakespeare play is a simple attestation of this fact. Candidates in competitive examinations still read Shakespeare with their tutors, but they are, nevertheless, most anxious for the performance of the particular play in which they are interested. They have learned that the artist is a not less instructive teacher than the commentator."

Figures are more substantial than theories; and it may be pertinently added that the sale of the Lyceum version of "Romeo and Juliet" reached 10,000 copies, while that of "Much Ado About Nothing" was even larger. This is a pleasant little nut for the sceptics who believe that the Lyceum audiences care less for the play than for the scenery.

That Mr. Irving is an emotional as well as an intellectual actor none who have entered into the spirit of his art can doubt. The union of intelligence and sensibility of which Talma speaks is conspicuous in everything he has done. It was natural, therefore, that he should hold a view of his art strongly antagonistic to that propounded

by Diderot in his "Paradoxe sur le Comédien." A translation of this work by Mr. Walter Herries Pollock has been published under the title of "The Paradox of Acting," and in an interesting preface Mr. Irving has combated Diderot's theory that a true actor should never feel. With the practical insight characteristic of the dramatic instinct, he brings the matter to the test of illustration.

"When Macready played Virginius after burying his loved daughter, he confessed that his real experience gave a new force to his acting in the most pathetic situations of the play. Are we to suppose that this was a delusion, or that the sensibility of the man was a genuine aid to the actor? Bannister said of John Kemble that he was never pathetic because he had no children. From this I infer that Bannister found that the moral quality derived from his domestic associations had much to do with his own acting. And John Bannister was a great actor. Talma says that when deeply moved he found himself making a rapid and fugitive observation on the alteration of his voice; and on a certain spasmodic vibration it contracted in tears. Has not the actor who can thus make his own feelings

part of his art an advantage over the actor who never feels, but makes his observations solely from the sensibility of others? Untrained actors, yielding to excitement on the stage, have been known to stumble against the wings in impassioned exit. But it is quite possible to feel all the excitement of the situation and yet be perfectly self-possessed. This is art which the actor who loses his head has not mastered. It is necessary to this art that the mind should have, as it were, a double consciousness, in which all the emotions proper to the occasion may have full swing, while the actor is all the time on the alert for every detail of his method. . . . Nor need it be contended that the actor of sensibility must always feel, that, as Diderot suggests, he must wear himself out by excess of soul. It may be that his playing will be more spirited one night than another. But the actor who combines the electric force of a strong personality with a mastery of the resources of his art, must have a greater power over his audiences than the passionless actor who gives a most artistic simulation of the emotions he never experiences."

A striking illustration of Mr. Irving's point may be drawn from his own experience. He has often

said that when playing Hamlet in provincial theatres, and not feeling sure of the stage-carpenter, he has firmly gripped the chair into which he throws himself at the end of the play-scene, perfectly alive, even in the whirlwind of his passion, to the risk of a tumble.

The most practical passage in Mr. Irving's preface to "Talma on the Actor's Art"—which he called the *vade mecum* of the actor's calling—has already been quoted. But another interesting passage is worthy of reproduction to show how earnestly Mr. Irving keeps ever before him a noble and exacting ideal.

"To the actor the whole field of human nature is open. Whether in the ideal world of the stage, or in the actual world of social intercourse, his mind is continually accumulating impressions which become a part of his artistic being. This experience is common to the students of other arts; but the actor has this advantage, that all he learns is embodied in his own personality, not translated through some medium, like the painter's canvas, or the novelist's page. At the same time this purely personal art is subjected to the most severe tests. It is easier to detect a flaw in an actor's impersonation than an improbability in a

book. One man enacts a character before many —a false intonation jars immediately upon the the ear; an unnatural look or gesture is promptly convicted by the eye. . . . There must be no suggestion of effort. The essence of acting is its apparent spontaneity. Perfect illusion is attained when every effect seems to be an accident. If the declamation is too measured, the sense of truth is at once impaired; if, on the other hand, it falls only the shadow of a shade below the level of appropriate expression, the auditor's sympathy is instantly checked. 'The union of grandeur without pomp, and nature without triviality,' is of all artistic ideals the most difficult to attain; and with this goal before him no actor can feel that his art is a plaything."

To the *Nineteenth Century* Mr. Irving has contributed three papers under the general title of "An Actor's Notes on Shakespeare." The first and least important, which appeared in April, 1877, was intended to show that the Third Murderer in "Macbeth" — by some commentators supposed to be Macbeth himself—was "an attendant" who figures in the opening of the third act. This speculation is sustained by a variety of reasons, which show the writer's mastery of detail.

Much more interesting is the article on "Hamlet and Ophelia" (May, 1877), in which Mr. Irving essays to show, not only that Hamlet was well aware before his last interview with his love that he was watched by the King and Polonius, but also that Ophelia was unaware of the plot. The aim is to vindicate Ophelia from the suspicion of weak insincerity, if not of downright falsehood, when she answers Hamlet's sudden question—"Where's your father?" with the plaintive "At home, my lord." Mr. Irving's stage-management of the prelude to this scene is here explained.

"There is nothing in the text or stage-directions that convicts of actual complicity. Her feeling was probably somewhat vague and confused, especially as she would not be taken more into confidence than was necessary. Much that was said in the interview between the Queen, the King, and Polonius might have been spoken apart from Ophelia; the room in the castle being probably a large one, in which a knot of talkers might not be overheard by a pre-occupied person. When suggestions of this sort are condemned as over-refined, it is, I think, too often forgotten that it must be settled between stage-managers and players, in every case, how the latter are to dis-

pose themselves when on the stage; that Shakespeare himself must have very much affected the complexion of his plays by his personal directions; that the most suggestive and therefore most valuable of these have been lost; and that in reproducing old plays, in which there is much scope and even great necessity for subtle indications of this kind, nothing can be too refined which intelligibly conveys to an audience a rational idea of each individuality and a consistent theory of the whole." These words are a key to Mr. Irving's system of representing Shakespeare; and they show how infinitely greater is the labour expended by him on the play than the care, thorough as that is, devoted to its pictorial setting.

The rest of this paper is a subtle analysis of Hamlet's emotions in the scene with Ophelia, emotions of which Mr. Irving's acting is a more vivid vehicle than his words. The third section of the "Actor's Notes" (February, 1879) is an explanation of Mr. Irving's reason for discarding the tradition which prescribes the use of actual pictures or medallions when Hamlet enjoins his mother to—

> "Look here upon this picture, and on this,
> The counterfeit presentment of two brothers."

Mr. Irving contended that the text itself did not authorise the use of such pictures, and laid stress on Hamlet's injunction, "Look you, now, what follows," as a proof that the "counterfeit presentment" was in the mind's eye only. Whether this theory be justifiable or not, there can be little doubt that the scene gains much in imaginative force from Mr. Irving's treatment. The Queen needs no portraits, miniature or full length, to sharpen the contrast between "the mildew'd ear" and "his wholesome brother." So much was Signor Salvini struck by the innovation, that he paid its author the compliment of adopting it. Mr. Irving took this opportunity to protest against excessive realism in the representation of Shakespeare, and indulged in a good-humoured jest at the expense of Mr. Tom Taylor, who, in a revival of "Hamlet" under his direction, had insisted on placing what looked like a crane near the platform at Elsinore, apparently in order to suggest the commercial activity of the Danes.

A fitting supplement to these contributions to the literature of the stage is the article entitled "The Production of a Play," which appeared in the New York *Spirit of the Times*. In this Mr. Irving described in much detail the working of

the great organisation behind the scenes at the Lyceum, from the rehearsals of the play down to the marshalling of the gas-men in the "flies." How the text is first prepared, how the characters are allotted, how the actors are fitted into their respective grooves, and all the angles of individual susceptibility rounded off, how the supernumeraries are inspired with the spirit of the scene, how the scenery is manipulated at the right moment, and how an intricate combination of lights is so arranged that every gas-man is in his place in the nick of time—all this is set forth with a fulness of knowledge which makes it clear that some of the faculties of a great general are needed to form a great manager.

CHAPTER XII.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS.

WHAT manner of man is he who has been the cynosure of English playgoers for a dozen years? If his impersonations are, as Mr. Archer acutely remarks, so many projections of his own individuality, how much individuality has he left in private life? There is a story told of Mr. Tennyson that somebody followed him for a long time in the hope of catching some pearl of poetic wisdom from his lips. For days, and even weeks, the quest for this holy grail was unsuccessful. The enthusiastic disciple never heard a word. At last he had the happiness to stand behind the Laureate one day while the latter, who was accompanied by Mrs. Tennyson, was gazing at a picture in the Royal Academy. The precious moment came. The poet spoke.

"My dear," he said, "I think I'll go and have some stout."

This is just the kind of legend which a cynical person might tell about Mr. Irving for the confusion of enthusiasts who fancy, when they see the actor in the street, and catch a glimpse of the pale and pensive face under the very broad-brimmed hat, that he is turning over in his mind some new reading of Shakespeare. The truth is that Mr. Irving is not an actor off the stage. He does not wrap himself in the ponderous majesty which became a second nature to John Kemble; nor does he habitually talk blank verse like Mrs. Siddons. On the other hand, he has shown no inclination for the vagaries of Edmund Kean, who used to row up the Thames with a small lion in the stern of the boat. Yet simple and natural as Mr. Irving's manner is, you cannot look long at those clear-cut features, which so admirably express the mingling of sensibility, refinement, and resolution, nor listen long to his talk about his art, without feeling that here is a strong man whose energetic character is streaked with imagination, as quartz is streaked with the precious metal.

Mr. Irving's pictures have generally been unsatisfactory. When he is photographed he nearly

always looks as if the apparatus at the back of his head had made him uncomfortable. He seems to have an objection to photographs "in character," for of late years only two have been taken. One was Vanderdecken and the other Shylock. Photographers are vainly besieged by people who wonder why they cannot have their favourite as Hamlet or Charles I.; and prentice hands have made rapid sketches of the actor when he is on the stage, sketches which have afterwards been photographed with painful results. To pictorial posters Mr Irving has never lent the light of his countenance; but he has been moulded in statuettes and medallions without end. Perhaps the photographers have always been flurried by his restless desire, as soon as he is seated, to get up and walk about. When an idea seizes him, which happens often, he is apt to start from his chair and pace the room with hasty strides, while he illustrates his topic with rapid gestures which make the listener feel the exceeding commonplace of sitting still. Yet, at other times, he will lapse into a reverie, and, talking more to himself than to you, relate, perhaps, some story of his early days, like a man in a dream.

The painters have been on the whole more

fortunate than the photographers, and at least one portrait has been produced which will give posterity a far better idea of Mr. Irving's personality than any number of counterfeit presentments of the "Alas! poor Yorick" species. This is the portrait painted by Mr. Millais for the Garrick Club. With astonishing skill the artist has caught the nervous vividness, so to speak, of the mobile face, and that peculiar distinction which would make any one who saw Mr. Irving for the first time in a crowd say, "There goes a remarkable man." Two other Academicians, Mr. Edwin Long and Mr. Frith, have painted Mr. Irving with unequal success. Mr. Long's portraits of the actor as Richard III. and Hamlet have every element except that of strength, while Mr. Frith's ambition to put Mr. Irving into a crowd of celebrities on one canvas has produced a sort of ghostly schoolboy. Another notable portrait is Mr. Whistler's Philip II., which would be a very satisfactory work if it did not suggest the Colossus of Rhodes in Spanish attire.[1]

"Irving is easy to caricature," remarked Mr. Millais, "because his face is so full of character." And certainly no public man of our time has been

[1] Of the sculptors, the late Mr. Brodie executed a fine bust of Mr. Irving, which is now in the possession of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts; and Mr. Onslow Ford has won high encomiums for his statue of the actor as Hamlet.

more persistently caricatured. He may fairly be said to divide this kind of honour with Mr. Gladstone, for wherever you see a comical picture of the Prime Minister, you are pretty sure to find a similar compliment to the actor in the same window. The recipe for a caricature of Mr. Irving is simple. Exaggerate a strongly marked eyebrow, elongate a very strong chin, put an enormous *pince-nez* on an extravagantly high-bridged nose, add an impossible wilderness of hair, an attenuated frame, and shadowy limbs, and the joy of the caricaturist is complete. Mr. Irving must have learned pretty early to regard such performances with equanimity, for he used to garnish the mantelpiece of his dressing-room at the theatre with these appurtenances of fame. The best story about his legs he tells himself. A parson told him that the only thing which troubled a tender conscience in the theatre was the ballet. "What do you think of the ballet, Mr. Irving?" The actor said he knew no more about it than his questioner. "But you have a ballet in your theatre." Mr. Irving disclaimed that honour. "Then why is it that so much is written about your legs?"

But let us glance for a moment at the actor's

abode. It is an unromantic spot, that house in Bond Street. Grimness, not to say grime, is suggested by the windows, which seem to have been designed for any purpose save that of admitting light. How many people gaze curiously at that uninviting exterior every day! Some of them seem to devote most of their spare time to loitering on the opposite side of the street in the hope of catching sight of Mr. Irving when he goes out to the theatre. Occasionally an admirer makes a rush at him, seizes him by the hand, mutters some incoherent ecstasies, and then flies round the nearest corner. Very "uncritical," this proceeding; but when a liberal allowance is made for the effect of the moon on a certain order of mind, there must remain a considerable number of hero-worshippers who feel that they cannot be sufficiently grateful to the man to whom they owe some of the highest and purest delight of their lives.

The door opens, and we are lost in gloom. Presently the eye, becoming accustomed to the darkness, discerns some pictures on the staircase wall. Here are bewitching ladies on curvetting steeds, and near them two gentlemen who are submitting their differences of opinion to the test

of cold steel. No doubt the ladies are the cause of the fury which is continued all the way upstairs, until, impatient for the *dénouement*, you arrive breathless at a spot where the soft glow from a coloured globe discloses one of the combatants being run through the body, while the other is simpering with satisfaction. This tragedy over, you have leisure to reflect that the old prints are intended to illustrate the delicacies of carte and tierce, and that the fair riders are innocent of everything except a professional anxiety to show their horsemanship.

There was a time when, turning into one of the rooms, you would have found yourself in the society of two very old and very black oak cabinets, a gigantic bookcase surmounted by a raven, probably the ominous bird which doth "bellow for revenge" in the play-scene in "Hamlet;" some fine old prints, notably one of Garrick, and another of that plump-faced youth, Master Betty, whom an inexplicable craze once christened the English Roscius; the Colossus of Rhodes; and a mantelpiece adorned with a curiously wrought shield, illustrating a passage in the lives of Adam and Eve; the whole illuminated by the actor's own candles, as Thackeray would have said, by

night, and by a dim religious light shed through the stained-glass windows in the day. But these curiosities have been whisked away to Mr. Irving's house at Hammersmith; so we mount a little higher and enter the actor's sanctum.

In the old days there was crowded into this room such a collection of interesting odds and ends that even a visitor who could calculate space with mathematical nicety found it difficult to sit down. Pictures, books, tables, a piano, a bust, a cabinet, and the inevitable suggestion of church in the windows, bewilder you even now before you begin to appreciate the artistic disarray. Mr. Irving seems to dislike nothing so much as a formal arrangement of his furniture. Even in this he can be neither commonplace nor classic. There is no severe assortment of ornaments in pairs. Everything looks as if it had been set down by accident, and yet the whole effect is as tasteful as the most fastidious sense could desire. You look around, and your eye is immediately caught by a vivid little sketch of Mr. Irving as Hamlet, lying at Ophelia's feet, and shading his eyes with the fan as he watches the king. This is the work of Mr. F. W. Lawson. Next to it is a picture by Mr. Cattermole, representing an ideal

Hamlet, with auburn hair, addressing the players. Opposite is one of Mr. Lawson's "children of the Great City," a typical little girl-Arab, standing at a street corner. Can that be a bust of Miss Terry? So it is; but the ever-changing charm of that winning actress's face cannot be reproduced in marble. Here is a cabinet full of curiosities—old rings once worn by famous actors, reminiscences of Garrick and Kean, Daniel Clarke's lantern—an odd medley of theatrical properties and souvenirs from Mr. Irving's friends. And then the books! Every edition of Shakespeare seems to be represented on these shelves, not to speak of individual copies of the plays already performed at the Lyceum, or of those which Mr. Irving's exhaustless energy has prepared for representation at some future time. Books of costume, some of them of great value, occupy a considerable space in this library, and a glance into them may reveal where the actor's unerring eye for the picturesque has found some fine harmony in colour. Mr. Irving's love of contrast, of light and shade in art, is visible everywhere, and it is especially noteworthy in the two striking portraits of Garrick which hang outside the door, just over a collection of old swords—the one representing "little

David" in a tragic mood, his piercing eyes almost flashing as you look at them; and the other full of the irresistible drollery of Abel Drugger.

There is only one other room like this. It is a charming little nook in the old house at Hammersmith, which Mr. Irving has lately reconstructed, and which promises to be one of the most delightful retreats in London. In this room an artist might well lose himself in a day-dream, if he were not disturbed by the three enormous dogs which scamper madly over the beautiful lawn, and then rub their noses against the window-pane, gazing hungrily at the stranger. If Mr. Irving wants an inspiration for the character of Mephistopheles, he should find it in that bronze statuette of Faust's familiar. Should he have Don Quixote in his mind's eye, there is the woful knight in full panoply. There, too, is an impressive head of Dante, and a still more vivid remembrance of Verona in a curious effigy of Friar Laurence, who gazes wistfully at the portrait of a beautiful boy, said to have been the original Romeo. And surely that is Imogen before the cave of Belarius; while all around are books enough to summon from the vasty deep of literature the countless spirits of poetry and art.

Amidst such surroundings it is easy to understand that Mr. Irving's artistic development makes it imperative for him to apply all his sense of the beautiful to the realisation of his dramatic ideals. Always an admirable talker, he is most animated and incisive when discussing this question of scenery. You feel that he is earnest about it because to a man whose business it is to bridge the real and the ideal, and who has entered thoroughly into both, the problem is not how to "amaze, indeed, the very faculties of eyes" with splendour of decoration, but how to do simple justice to the poet's conception. Whatever may be said with truth against Mr. Irving's management, it can never be said that he has deliberately sacrificed one iota of dramatic principle to win popular applause by mere spectacular display.

But after he has abandoned himself to a frolic with his dogs, you may find the actor in another mood. He tells a story not only with the quiet humour which illustrates the keen observation of the man of the world, but often with a gaiety which is irresistible. Somebody said one day that the old lady who acts as custodian of Shakespeare's house at Stratford-on-Avon had made disparaging remarks about Mr. Irving. He might be a very

fine actor, she said, but he could not care much for the great poet he professed to admire, for he had never taken the trouble to pay Stratford a visit. This in the old lady's eyes was an unpardonable offence. "Such is fame," remarked Mr. Irving. "I have been there, but she doesn't remember me. I went with a friend, and just opposite Shakespeare's house we met a native, and asked him whose place that was over there. 'Dunno,' he said. 'Come, come, you must know who lives there. Is his name Shakespeare?' 'Dunno.' 'But can't you tell us whether he's alive now?' 'Dunno.' 'But surely you know whether he was famous—whether he ever did anything?' 'Yees, he—he——' 'Well, what did he do?' 'He writ summut.' 'That's it—we were sure you knew all about him. What did he write?' 'He writ a boible.'"

It is plain that as a manager Mr. Irving is more successful than Macready. Apart from the consideration that there are more playgoers now than there were in Macready's time, there is one potent fact which goes far to explain Mr. Irving's better fortune. He is devoted to his art, and Macready was not. All who knew Macready knew that his heart was not in his profession.

His writings show that he was never weary of cursing the miserable fate which had made him an actor. Great as was his reputation, he took no pride in it, and to the last regarded the stage almost with loathing. Phelps, who, as we have seen, had something of the same spirit, said on one occasion that the qualities which would make success on the stage might be more usefully and honourably devoted to some other calling. Much as Macready's acting was admired by his contemporaries, and valuable as are the traditions he created, his unhappy temper made a wide popularity impossible. People cannot be very enthusiastic about an actor who despises the profession which has made his fame. There are many stories of Macready's deplorable infirmity, but one which, perhaps, is little known, has the advantage of a redeeming humour. The Queen was anxious to have a dramatic performance at Windsor, and commanded Charles Kean to organise it. Kean felt that it would be a graceful compliment to Macready to solicit his invaluable co-operation. Macready consented to act, but he would not attend the rehearsals of the play, which was "Julius Cæsar." Kean was much annoyed at this, but nothing was said, and the performance was given

at Windsor with very great success. When all was over, Macready, who had addressed no word to anybody, save on the stage, stalked off to his dressing-room. It was the custom for the actors to sup together after the entertainments at the Castle, and Kean, though incensed at Macready's behaviour, sent him an invitation to join the company at table. The messenger knocked at door of the dressing-room. "Come in," growled the tragedian. "If you please, sir, Mr. Kean has sent me——" "Go out!" When this gracious reply was reported to Kean, he was furious. "Oh, I'll go and make it all right," said an actor who knew Macready well. So he knocked at the door, and announced his name. "Come in, sir." "Mr. Macready, I heard just now that Mr. Kean had sent to you——" "If Mr. Kean has any communication to make to me, I refer him to my lawyer," thundered Macready. Probably this was the first and only time that an invitation to supper was referred to a legal adviser.

Mr. Irving, on the other hand, has neglected no opportunity of exalting his profession. It is not too much to say that the English stage owes more to him for its social elevation than it owes to any one of his predecessors. He has brought

back to the theatre a great number of people who had learned to shun it, and has made playgoers of men and women who a few years ago were wont to boast that they had never seen a dramatic entertainment. Dissenting divines open their hearts to him and wish him God-speed. A popular Presbyterian minister in Edinburgh, who had never visited a theatre in his life, was persuaded to see Mr. Irving in "Hamlet," and for genuine sympathy and honest judgment his tribute to the actor may be commended to the attention both of the class who still regard the stage as an abomination, and of writers sitting in the seat of the scorners, and assuming that any one who is not an habitual playgoer must be uncritical.[1]

It must be this love and mastery of his art which make Mr. Irving's name a talisman even to thousands who have never seen him. He is the repository of all manner of confidences from all manner of people in all stations of life. Many who have entered into the spirit of his acting seem to feel instinctively that a man who has made real and vivid to them some of the greatest creations of the human mind must have a heart

[1] See Appendix.

alive to the longings and sufferings of his fellow-creatures. But this fascination extends to many more to whom he is quite unknown, and who, often from remote parts of the world, send their simple messages of hearty goodwill.

Something has already been said of the recruits Mr. Irving has won to the stage. The remarkable growth of amateur dramatic clubs is another sign of his influence. When by a misconception of an after-supper speech he was supposed to have poured contumely on the whole race of amateur actors, there ran a thrill of horror through the country. At first blush there seemed something so wanton in the attack that most amateurs for a time were speechless. It was as if some highly respected veteran, after patting a small boy kindly on the head, had suddenly whipped out a birch and chastised him. Many of the dramatic clubs owned Mr. Irving as godfather, and rejoiced in the borrowed magic of his name. Everywhere he was regarded as a confidant who was sure to sympathise with amateurs in their struggles with the listlessness or open hostility of uncultured neighbours. Many a youth lingered fondly and hopefully over Mr. Irving's anecdote of his vigil at the door of the Freemason's Tavern, when he watched the en-

trance and the exit of celebrated actors who attended the annual dinner of the Royal General Theatrical Fund. That Mr. Irving, of all men, should turn as it were upon his offspring, and incontinently rend them, was therefore nothing short of a cataclysm. He was overwhelmed with remonstrances, and only by protracted explanations, both public and private, was he able to make it clear that he had been wholly misunderstood, and that, so far from having intended to throw discredit upon amateur actors as a body, he regarded them as an aid to the advancement of intelligence.

Mr. Irving's social success has been unstinted. He has done more than any other actor to break down that pride which prompted too many people to regard those who have made the stage their sphere of life as an inferior caste, very well behind the footlights, but not fit to be admitted into society. In the highest circles in which genius has a place of honour, Mr. Irving is a representative figure. It is true that much of this esteem is due to his high personal character, his generosity, his amiability, his courtesy. The critics who are always trying to get at the back of the north wind seem to suggest that without these qualities his

success would have been comparatively small. "In these," says one, "as in all his other merits and most of his defects, nature seems to have foreseen the circumstances in which he would be placed, and to have provided him with all that could be helpful to him. There are some men to whom the gifts of even the most malignant fairies are in course of time transmuted into blessings. They seem to have bribed the constellations at their birth, to have 'corrected fortune' in cutting of the cards of life, to have cogged the dice in their game of fate." So, you see, that if Mr. Irving had only been a cross-grained curmudgeon, if he had been grasping and niggardly, if he had combined in his own person some of the worst faults of famous actors in the past, if, in a word, he had not been a high-bred gentleman as well as a great artist, then the success of his talents might have corresponded exactly with a foot-rule measurement. As it is, his open-handed and hospitable nature makes friends of people who ought to be soured by his mannerisms, and provokes Diogenes to declare that nearly all the sources of critical intelligence are adulterated by "chicken and champagne." This is almost as good as the shibboleth which is the latest out-

come of a severe and unbiassed judgment of Mr. Irving. "He indicates rather than attains the highest possibilities;" as if any finite intelligence ever did attain the highest possibilities. What Mr. Irving's art indicates is a world of imagination into which, but for him, many playgoers would never have entered. What he has attained is a higher point of dramatic interpretation than any of his English-speaking contemporaries can claim —a higher point, indeed, in more than one of his tragic impersonations than has probably ever been attained before.

"At that time," said a brother actor, speaking of Mr. Irving as a very young man, "he was recognised only by the few; by the many his mannerisms were considered drawbacks to him; but his ways were just the same then as now. There was the same conviction of success about him that exists now in its realisation." There is something more than this. Mr. Irving is wholly unspoiled by good fortune. His head has never been turned. He has never made stepping-stones of friends and then forgotten them. His social conquests have never weaned him from his absorbing love of his art. It is no secret that, did he wish it, Mr. Irving might now bear a title. There was a strong disposition in very high places to

extend to the head of a noble profession this recognition of great public services. But Mr. Irving preferred to remain a commoner for reasons which were sufficiently explained in the speech to his fellow-actors, to which reference has already been made. "There is a mode of rewarding actors which has been much talked of lately—the conferring of titles. Grateful as we would be for the motive which would dictate such an honour, the acceptance, I believe, would be a mistake. Titles for painters, if you like—they paint at home; for writers—they write at home; for musicians—they compose at home. But the actor plays his part in the presence of the public, amongst his colleagues, without whom he is powerless; and to give him any distinction which others would not enjoy would be prejudicial to his success, and fatal, I believe, to his popularity." Mr. Irving's motive for preserving the democracy of the play-bill must be respected even by those who think that an honour conferred upon an English actor by his Sovereign would give the final blow to the social prejudice against which the dramatic profession has had so long to struggle.

"In the long run of popular remembrance, the best reward to be hoped for by those of us who

most succeed is to be cited to unbelieving persons when we are dead, as illustrations of the vast superiority of by-gone actors to any one who may be seen on the stage of the day." In one of his essays Mr. Irving has thus described the common lot of the foremost in his profession. Those who are grateful to him—and their name is legion—for his services to the English stage, for his services to the study of Shakespeare, for his services in beating down bigotry, and widening the domain of culture, have no doubt that, in the long run of popular remembrance, his great deeds will be held up as a high and stimulating example to all who pursue his noble art with an earnest spirit and with an unflagging zeal.

APPENDIX.

LIST OF PARTS PLAYED BY MR. IRVING IN LONDON SINCE OCTOBER 6, 1866.

Character.	*Play.*
Doricourt	The Belle's Stratagem.
Rawdon Scudamore (*Original*)	Hunted Down.
Harry Dornton	Road to Ruin.
Joseph Surface	School for Scandal
Charles Surface	Do.
Count Falcon (*Original*) ...	Idalia.
Charles Arundel	My Aunt's Advice.
Robert Audley	Lady Audley's Secret
Felix Featherley	Widow Well Won.
Henry Thorncote	Only a Clod.
Charles Torrens	Serious Family.
Robert Macaire	Robert Macaire.
Charles Mowbray (*Original*)	Tale of Procida.
Ferment	School of Reform.

The O'Hoolaghan (*Original*)	Rapid Thaw.
Petruchio	Katherine and Petruchio.
Bob Gassit (*Original*) ...	Dearer than Life.
Bill Sikes (*Original*)	Oliver Twist.
Cool	London Assurance.
Faulkland	The Rivals.
Redburn (*Original*)	Lancashire Lass.
Robert Arnold (*Original*) ...	Not Guilty.
Brown	Spitalfield's Weaver.
Young Marlow	She Stoops to Conquer.
De Neuville	Plot and Passion.
Victor Dubois	Ici On Parle Français.
John Peerybingle	Dot.
Colonel Fitzherbert (*Original*)	All For Money.
Compton Kerr (*Original*) ...	Formosa.
Reginald Chevenix (*Original*)	Uncle Dick's Darling
Alfred Skimmington (*Original*)	Love or Money.
Digby Grant (*Original*) ...	Two Roses.
Frank Friskly	Boots at the Swan.
Colonel Kirk	Wolf in Sheep's Clothing.
Landry Barbeau	Fanchette.
Jingle (*Original*)	Pickwick.
Mathias (*Original*)	The Bells.
Jeremy Diddler	Raising the Wind
Charles I. (*Original*)	Charles I.
Eugene Aram (*Original*) ...	Eugene Aram.
Richelieu	Richelieu.
Philip (*Original*)	Philip.
Hamlet	Hamlet.
Macbeth	Macbeth.

Othello	Othello.
Iago	Do.
Tristan[1]	King René's Daughter.
Philip of Spain	Queen Mary.
Richard	King Richard III.
Dubosc, Lesurques	Lyons Mail.
Louis	Louis XI.
Vanderdecken (*Original*) ...	Vanderdecken.
Claude Melnotte	Lady of Lyons.
Sir Edward Mortimer ...	Iron Chest.
Shylock	Merchant of Venice.
Louis, Fabien	Corsican Brothers.
Synorix (*Original*)	The Cup.
Modus	The Hunchback.
Romeo	Romeo and Juliet.
Benedick	Much Ado About Nothing.

Mr. Edwin Booth on the English Stage.

Before Mr. Irving's visit to America, Mr. Booth, yielding to the unappeasable interviewer, expressed an interesting opinion of Mr. Irving both as an actor and a stage-manager.

"Do you think," said the interviewer, "that

[1] Mr. Irving also played this character in "Iolanthe," Mr. Wills's dramatic version of the Danish poem.

Mr. Irving is as great an artist as our English cousins would have us believe?" "He is a thorough artist," said Mr. Booth; "and his earnestness, his scholarly taste, his intellectuality, are as plainly seen in his acting as his sense of the picturesque is shown in his stage settings. He is an actor of great natural ability and much polish; his mannerisms are marked, and at first distract your attention, particularly in his peculiarities of voice, but one soon becomes accustomed to them, and forgets them in the enjoyment of his admirable acting. As a stage-manager, he is despotic. He sits on the stage during rehearsals, watching every movement and listening to every word. If he sees anything to correct or alter, he rises and points out the fault, giving the proper form, when the scene is repeated. He commands all points, with an understanding that his will is absolute law, that it is not to be disputed, whether it concerns the entry of a mere messenger who bears a letter, or whether it is the reading of an important line by Miss Terry. From first to last he rules his stage with an iron will, but as an offset to this he displays a patience that is marvellous."

Mr. Booth then proceeded to compare the thea-

trical taste of English audiences with that of American audiences, very much to the advantage of the latter. Speaking of the attitude of English audiences toward Shakespeare, he complained of "the lack of sympathy, that quick appreciation of every line uttered, which at once makes itself felt across the footlights when to those acting upon the stage and to those listening from the benches the play is equally familiar, and every scene is thoroughly anticipated, comprehended, and enjoyed. I do not say that the English people lack intelligence to comprehend or admire their great poet. I mean that they are not thoroughly accustomed to hearing him spoken from the stage.

"After my London engagement I was to go to Manchester, Liverpool, and through the provincial circuit, and I proposed to go to certain cities and towns, relying on good stock scenery which I wanted prepared, and such as would do on any American tour. My English manager at once ridiculed the idea. 'Shakespeare, my dear sir,' he said, 'will not draw a handful of people unless presented as Mr. Irving gives it at the Lyceum.' It is not that we are unaccustomed to equally elegant presentations of the drama, for we have

had famous revivals in America, in which silks and satins and precious stones have been used with lavish profusion, and in which all that money, ingenuity, and the painter's art can do has been done to set the stage with regal splendour. But these spectacles have been short-lived with us, lasting only till the eye tired of the brilliant show; but thereafter with ordinary scenic setting and a good company the play itself has drawn, season after season, large and enthusiastic audiences. 'The play's the thing,' after all with American audiences, if it is well played.

"I find the largest and most refined as well as most demonstrative audiences that I draw present at the performances of, say, 'Richard III.,' or 'Hamlet,' or 'Macbeth,' although I have frequently changed my bills to plays other than from my Shakespearian repertory, in order to test the public taste. The managers of the theatres where I have played, whose business interest it is to keep their fingers on the pulse of the public and note any change, have uniformly requested me, when for a needed relief I have urged an abandonment of Shakespeare for a few nights, not to do so, as I should abandon that which was most profitable to them, because most to the

people's taste. This I have found not alone in the great cities, but throughout the country. My Shakespearian nights have been my greatest successes, financially and popularly, during my late season, and in New York and Galveston—two cities as wide apart in all ways as two cities could be—I found the same result. Were my judgment wrong in this the public would soon convince me of my error, for you cannot compel Americans to come to the theatre to see that for which they do not care. They never hiss a performance, and uniformly treat actors with courtesy, but they will obstinately remain away from a play they do not care for, and effectually kill it by neglect. Consequently were there not a genuine admiration for Shakespeare in America, I should be obliged to do as Mr. Irving does in England—that is, to resort to such plays as 'The Bells,' 'The Courier of Lyons,' &c., which are melodramas."

There are one or two considerations which Mr. Booth has overlooked. He forgets that when he he played in "Othello" at the Lyceum, Londoners did not flock to that theatre to feast their eyes on the scenery, of which nobody took any particular notice. They went to see a great play

most admirably acted. Mr. Booth's English manager showed curious ignorance of the facts. That regal splendour is not needed to make Shakespeare a theatrical success in England is shown by the circumstance that, with scenery which cost next to nothing, Mr. Irving originally played Hamlet for two hundred nights in London, and for another hundred or more in the provinces. Shakespearian nights at the Lyceum and in the principal cities of England and Scotland are Mr. Irving's greatest successes—witness the unequalled popularity of "Hamlet," "Much Ado About Nothing," and "The Merchant of Venice." It follows from this that Mr. Irving is not obliged to resort to such plays as "The Bells," "The Courier of Lyons," and other melodramas. These are produced because they give scope to one side of his art, not because they are indispensable to his exchequer. "Shakespeare as Mr. Irving presents it at the Lyceum" is something wholly different from the "famous revivals in America" described by Mr. Booth; and the pride of English audiences in the national dramatist need "moult no feather.

Mr. Irving's Macbeth.

An admirable article by Mr. Edward R. Russell, in the *Fortnightly Review* for October, 1883, gives a very clear insight into Mr. Irving's much-debated conception of Macbeth.

"The Macbeth of Mr. Irving," says Mr. Russell, "is one of the latest illustrations of a progress which has been all in one direction. The great actors of the classical type, some before Garrick and some after, did much to secure for Shakespeare the rank among classics which was his due, but they did little to bring out the qualities which are more peculiarly Shakespeare's own. This has been done more effectually by Garrick, by Kean, by Macready, and by Irving, all of whom have been carped at as melodramatic, or as something equivalent. These artists, more than critics or commentators, have enlarged and rendered more truthful the prevailing conceptions of Shakespeare's characters; and these are found to be permanently enriched by subtle and profound reflections, carried out in details of similar spirit, rather than by that rotund and nobly proportioned grandeur which is sometimes assumed to be the highest intellectual achievement of theatrical art."

Mr. Russell proceeds to argue that the continual mistake of dramatic interpreters of the Kemble school, and some of their predecessors, was the supposition that Shakespeare's characters are always sublime. There was a tradition that Macbeth was a hero and Lady Macbeth a splendid woman; and the magnificence of Mrs. Siddons wholly obscured the true conception which stared every reader in the face as he pored over the Shakespearian text. Macbeth was not a noble and generous man, but a moral coward, though brave in the field, as moral cowards have often been. His wife was a strong-nerved and determined woman, who would have scorned to contemplate a villainy she dared not commit, and who was so unheroic as to brace her spirits with drink before the murder of Duncan. There is nothing splendid in her conduct or that of her husband.

"Following from scene to scene, and from speech to speech, the wickedness of Macbeth, as his wife sustains his spirits for the fulfilment of the guilt which is his chosen *rôle*, it seems incredible—now that Irving has given us the cue for truer thought on the subject—that it should be levelled at any actor as a reproach that he

makes Macbeth craven and abject. What is the man else? What greatness has he except in the field, in vivid eloquence, and in a desperate death at bay? It is no weakness to shrink from crime. To recoil from a misdeed which promises wealth or power is to many a nature a task requiring vast strength of moral principle. No one would call Macbeth a coward for being horrified at the thought of murder. But Macbeth was meanly wicked, because his mind did not revolt from the deed but only from its accompaniments and consequences.

"When Irving, as Macbeth, goes off with his wife, saying, in a half-vacant, half-desperate manner, that the false face must hide what the false heart doth know, the spectator feels as he looks at him that his face will never be false enough to hide his trouble, and that Lady Macbeth will have the intolerable responsibility of keeping up a curtain of fair show before the horrible realities which will presently and for long years be the basis of their greatness. And this is only one of many thoughtful points. With this reflective actor it is often in another scene than that in which they occur that the words of any particular passage receive their finest illustration.

Sometimes there is great strength in his abstention from usual effects. For instance, previous Macbeths have made a great point by a complete change of manner, at the words when Banquo's ghost vanishes,

'Why so,
Being gone, I am a man again.'

Mr. Irving, on the other hand, delivers these words in the anxious tone of a man who ought to feel relieved, but in reality does not. This is much truer. It may probably be taken as a rule that sudden absolute changes of manner, which leave no trace of the previous tone of feeling, are unnatural and melodramatic, except where there is an entire change of the material circumstances; and even then they are not always true to life. So here is one among many instances of this actor being less instead of more melodramatic than others. But there is equal power in his enactments of each scene as it passes. In the dagger scene we perceive the profound meaning which, in a man of Macbeth's mould, lay in his previous undertaking to 'bend up each corporal agent to his terrible feat.' According to the notions which seem to prevail among a majority of critics, any such effort should be unnecessary.

If he were going to battle, and were in danger of immediate death, his corporal energies would need no bracing; why should noble Macbeth become physically unstrung at the task of killing a weak old man in his sleep? Shakespeare knew better, and Irving, as was said of him in Hamlet, 'will not go out of the character.' As he enters alone, and begins to follow the dagger in the air, which —significant phrase—marshals him the way *that he was going*, his gait is that of a sick man roused from his couch and feebly staggering to his feet amidst the swayings of an earthquake. As at length he creepingly approaches the door of the king's chamber, at the words, 'Thou sure and firm set earth,' his feet, as it were, feel for the ground, as if he were walking with difficulty a step at a time on a reeling deck. When he returns after committing the murder, we see at once, if we are calm enough, what Irving has added to the achievements of his greatest predecessors in this scene. Hazlitt, whose comments on Macbeth are not altogether worthy of him, said of Edmund Kean, that he left it in doubt whether he was a king committing a murder, or a man committing a murder to be king, but that as a lesson in common humanity his acting was

heart-rending. 'The hesitation,' says Hazlitt, 'the bewildered look, the manner in which his voice clung to his throat and choked his utterance, his agony and tears, the force of nature overcome by passion, beggared description.' This must have sufficiently surprised the Kemble school. Irving has partly added, partly substituted, an idea of tremendous physical prostration, essential to the character of one whose bravery all leaves him when he is wickedly engaged. He reels, he totters, he can barely support himself. One fears that he will smear his wife's arms, or stain his own clothes, with the bloody daggers, as he half holds them in a sort of paralytic clutch, with all intelligent grip and management gone out of his fingers. His very articulation is as if his teeth were loosened and his tongue swollen. He flounders and all but faints in forlorn wretchedness and horror. His body sways as if already hanging on a gibbet. He is slowly dragged off the stage, moaning, more dead than alive.

"To understand this it is not enough to feel the situation. We must know the true Macbeth. We must see, as his wife has seen from the first, that he is capable of suggesting and devising crime but not of insensibility in committing it.

"The true Macbeth, as portrayed by our latest great actor, is neither a generous hero nor an insensate criminal. He is a man who, though not devoid of moral feeling, is without operative conscience—a man who, innocent of cruel tastes or malignant resolve to be a villain, is always, and knows he is always, open to the suggestions and invitations of his besetting passion—a man ever ready to meet such cues to wickedness half-way—and not capable, even when racked by fear and misery, of entertaining the idea that moral considerations are to veto any act which he considers for his interest."

A Scottish Clergyman's First Visit to a Theatre.

The Rev. Dr. Kay, of Edinburgh, after witnessing Mr. Irving's performance of Hamlet at the New Lyceum Theatre in that city, contributed a graphic account of his experiences to the *Scotsman* of September 21, 1883.

"When I enter the theatre I do not find the traditional glare and brilliancy which I have been accustomed to associate in my own mind with the theatre. Elegance, excellent taste, ornament

subdued rather than multiplied—that was what I found; and it occurred to me that were some of our churches as well and elegantly finished inside, the eye would be refreshed when the ear grew sluggish. A glance at the inmates of the house was to me somewhat disappointing. For many years I had been told that the frequenters of the theatre were anything but respectable. I have somewhere in my desk a 'track,' which professes to photograph them; but the photograph must have been taken under the unfavourable circumstances which result in a man having two noses, and a lady having a bad squint; or, what is worse, the one hand that of a child, and the other that of an ogress. The 'dress circles' looked very much like the folk who meet of an evening in Moray Place, a region devoted to fashion, and happily altogether free from grog-shops. Speaking of drawing-rooms, that at the Lyceum is exquisite. I advise all young ladies who are about to set up house to visit it; in doing so they need not go into the play. The pit: I am sure I saw Charles Lamb there—a thinnish man, with a Jewish-like, brownish face, no whiskers, and an elderly sedate-looking lady, whom he seemed to have in safe keeping. I took it to be his sister.

And the gallery: a gentleman near me spoke of the 'gods,' and I, in my simplicity, turned my eyes up, not towards, but *to*, the ceiling, and have, just at this moment, a faint reminiscence of a crick in the neck got through the elevated nature of my investigations. Being advised to look a little lower, I then saw the 'gods,' and remarkably well-behaved 'gods' they were, too. I picked out a butcher's lad, whom I have seen passing up and down our street daily; but his familiar and distracting whistle had ceased, and I could see the glitter of a tear as Ophelia strewed the stage with the rosemary and the rue. 'Oh power of genius,' thought I, 'that can bring a tear to the eye of a rubicund butcher's boy;' but she did it, and so wrought upon him that the red handkerchief, which is the 'badge of all his tribe,' was brought into frequent use.

"Passing from the audience to the stage, I need scarcely say that a more delightful evening, or one more entirely free from evil, so far as the acting and actors were concerned, could not have been spent anywhere. 'Free from evil' is too negative; I therefore say 'more instructive and interesting.' First of all, Mr. Irving's Hamlet, of which I have read many criticisms, challenges

my attention. I begin to comprehend wherein lies the mighty force of that interpretation, which leads me to say to myself—'Here are two poets, Shakespeare and Irving, both of them makers, creators of something new.' I am no longer reading about Hamlet; I am seeing him. I look and watch, and watch and look, for what some critics have called 'his mannerism,' but I cannot see it. I endorse all of praise which has been bestowed upon the representation of Hamlet by Mr. Irving, and begin to act as critic myself. Among minute things, which yet betray the master, and the result of incessant study, I note how the *left* hand begins to speak. There is a nimble deftness about it which I have never suspected to belong to the left hand; a motion of it is half a sentence. I see how the sinuous motion of the limbs, as he lies at the feet of Ophelia, tells more than half of the story which issues in the abrupt breaking up of the court, as it witnesses Gonzago. I declare that the by-play of the features is inimitable and the elocution perfect, save in one respect, which I now indicate. I *was* disappointed with the well-known 'soliloquy;' and yet, had I either the time or the means to see Mr. Irving's Hamlet a second time,

I might change my mind about this point. What authority is there for emphasising the 'to' in the sentence, 'To be, or not to be?' It seems to me that, in this well-known soliloquy, of which each man has his own ideal interpretation, Mr. Irving's manner is much too self-conscious. The words ought not to be spoken so loudly. He (Mr. Irving) wears to me the aspect of a man who wishes his audience to know that he is saying a host of good things. I miss the absorbed air with which I have accustomed myself to think of Hamlet in this wonderful outpouring of the fruit of a life-study. In a word, Hamlet should not meditate that he is meditating. Again, the transitions from the feigned madness to the sharp, incisive common-sense of the Prince is at times too violent. I could wish the shading to be a little more gradual. There are times in which the madness ought, as it seems to me, to run into the sanity, and *vice versâ*. The scene in which the Prince probes the guilty soul of the Queen is, from first to last, exquisite; but in some parts, notably at the beginning of the interview, if such a thing could be compassable by the actor's art, of making love for his mother shine like a streak of light through his anger, it would realise more

perfectly, I think, the idea which Shakespeare had. To atone for what, I fear, is an impertinence in one who up till now has only *read* Hamlet, not seen him, let me say that, in one action in the 'grave' scene, I saw what I conceive to be the perfection of the player's art—*i.e.*, 'to suggest.' As Mr. Irving returns Yorick's skull to the grave-digger, you should see with what infinite tenderness, nay, with what reverence, he handles the skull of the poor player. You are beginning to grow sentimental over it, and so is Hamlet, when the quick, short toss of the grave-digger recalls Hamlet and the audience to the fact that comedy may lie under the very ribs of death.

"In the last scene everything is perfect. When I see the rapiers, I think (such a wayward creature is man) of the Masters Crummles, and how the little one beats the big one, and up and at it again is the *mot d'ordre* of the day. I smile as I contrast the two, the nimble, lightning-like flash of the tempered steel, with the one, two, three of transpontine conflicts. May I venture to suggest where a point could be made? Why does Hamlet, in dying, and as he raises his face to the face of Horatio, his friend, not kiss him?

It seems to me the last touch which is wanting to a performance which the young among the audience will tell to their children as one of the highest efforts of human genius which they have ever seen. It is unlikely that I shall ever have the opportunity of saying 'Thank you' to Henry Irving for his work last night; I do it now, and my whole heart goes with the words.

"And Ophelia—aha, my masters, to have seen Miss Terry's Ophelia is to see the most perfect personation of the character which can be seen in this year of grace, 1883. She realises for me what I have already conceived to be the true Ophelia. 'Of course,' the reader will say, 'she may do that, and not be perfect; because your 'doxy is my 'doxy, it does not therefore follow that either, or both, is orthodoxy.' Certainly not, but this in reference to Miss Terry is not to be argued. In the words of the Scottish song—

> 'She's a' my fancy painted her,
> She's charming, she's divine!'

I do not know where I can address Shakespeare. Some of my friends would be quite prepared to give me his address, but I am not sure but that the letter would find its way to 'the dead office.'

If I could get parlance with him, I would say, 'Do not, for any sake, litter the stage with *four* dead bodies, as the *dénouement* of the finest tragedy that ever mortal man wrote.'"

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